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Arthur Sullivant Hoffman MANAGING EDITOR

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with any old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relatives Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

WOULD like to hear from, or know what has become of Ed. (Wessel) Deckard, at one time soldier in the Philippine Islands and last heard from about 4 years ago in London, England.—Address R. CURRIER ERICKSON, Redondo Beach, Calif.

DO ANY of the Camp-Fire remember the scout and military detective who served at headquarters of 3rd U. S. Infantry at San Fernando, Pampanga, in 1900-1 and who was known in that province and Bulacan as "Lintic" O'Sea "El Rayo"? And who of them remembers the hanging of Rojas?—Address No. 95.

WOULD be glad to hear from any of my old shipmates on the *Boston* at Manila, May 1, '98.—Address No. L. T. 96.

WOULD like to learn whereabouts of an Irishman called Eugene Geary, last heard of in Baltimore, Md. Now writing alleged poetry and things for newspapers.—Address D. DORSEY GUY, 23 E. Montgomery Ave., Pittsburgh, Pa.

WOULD like to locate the old comrades that sailed with me on the *Evening Star*, namely, Percy M. DuBois, R. R. Plum, Chas. Carruthers, Lester N. Selig, Thos. L. Hogan and Andy Osbourne.—Address CAPT. A. E. SELIG, 36 Monte Vista Ave., Oakland, Calif.

I WOULD like to know the whereabouts of Captain Vaughn of the Canadian Scouts. He was a lieutenant in Remington's Guides and a braver man never lived. He left the Tigers and went over to join Col. F. Ross, another of our braves. I last saw him while I was on the S. S. Dept. Capetown. I would be more than pleased to hear from any of the boys who were in Remington's Guides in Roberts' Horse or the Colonial Light Horse. all knew me as the little Canadian, for I was boy of seventeen when I ran away to South Address PERCY TRESSIDDER, 2705a N. St. Louis, Mo.

"Camp-Fire" members who have ...o and thereabouts recently and ... years furnish any clues as to ...its (if living) of Captain F. T. ... yachtsman, dilettante and ...er, B. C. ...bout four ... ...hton, ...ved ...my. ...

will be greatly appreciated by his erstwhile friend and companion, J. H. C. MURRAY, Staff Sergt. R. Can. Engineers, Signal Hill, Esquimalt, B. C., Canada.

ADDRESS wanted by shipmate of Frank (?) Montieth, who was mate of the four-masted bark *William P. Frye* when she sailed on her maiden voyage, December, 1902, New York to Shanghai. —Address W. H. DAVIS, Chico, New Mexico.

CAN anybody give me information that will lead to the whereabouts of J. W. McKenzie who is a hospital apprentice in the U. S. Navy at the present time? The reason I ask this favor is because he is a brave young man and because he saved the lives of my wife and daughter in Peking, China, during the rebellion last year, at the risk of his own. The last I saw of him was when he left Peking for the Philippines. I will send the inform- nt a check and also my thanks if he will be kind enough to send me that young man's address, and his description. If McKenzie reads this himself he will save you this trouble and also be compensated for his brave act—which it was to me if not to him.—Address, C. J. CALHOUN, 1312 Fourteenth Street, San Francisco, Calif.

NOT being sure of the spelling of one name asked for in the following, we have queried it, so that the man in question will not be thrown off the scent:

Would like to hear from Frank Miller, John Cramford and Lee Cramford, who lived in Ennis, Texas, in Spring and Summer of 1892. I would like to hear from Private William Harson [?], 2nd Bat. 1st Scots Guards. The last time I heard from him he was at Picquet Barracks, London S. W.—Address HARVEY MORRIS, Co. D, 22nd Inf., Texas City, Tex.

WOULD Thomas J. Kelly, last heard of in Co. F, 9th Infantry, in 1905, and also ex-prize-fighter, please write to Joseph R. Brandamour. Very important.—Address at Cornelia Street, Plattsburg, N. Y.

IF IN your "Lost Trails" you can get in touch with some of my old comrades I would much like to hear from T. S. M. Cottrell, Corp. McEwen, Trooper Cooper, Sergt. Dacombe of B Troop, M. M. P. Rhodesian Campaign of 1896-97. Also

(Continued on page 224)

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Adventure

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October 1913 Vol.6 No.6

At Mile Ninety-Two

A Tale of Friendship and the Northwest Mounted

by Hulbert Footner

CHAPTER I

PALS

GEORGE KENASTON sat in barracks making believe to read "The Life of Nelson" which lay on the table between his elbows, but in reality listening with desirous ears to a murmur of men's voices that floated in through the window. "Barracks" was a shack fifteen feet by twenty, with log walls and a canvas roof; and Trooper Kenaston, age twenty-two, represented the entire force of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police of Canada at Mile Ninety-Two, the latest established post of the service.

The camp at Mile Ninety-Two marked the limit of construction for the present season of a new railway-line across the Rockies. The place was three months old, and already there were four graves in the cemetery, only one of which had been filled as a result of natural causes.

During the first week, two Swedes had done for each other with knives. This affair was hushed up. Since both had died, it was considered that the ends of justice were accomplished. But only a few weeks later Black Mag had shot at Baldy Red Hafner, bringing down one Frenchy, a friend, and this gave rise to a scandal. Wires were warmed, red tape was unwound and out of the hardest-worked and shortest-handed force in the world a man was somehow produced to keep the peace at Mile Ninety-Two.

Sergeant Markley had brought up Kenaston two weeks before, and had remained a week with him. Since then the youngster had been on his own, very much on his own, for the boys of Mile Ninety-Two deeply resented the imputation of lawlessness that his coming put upon the place.

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Stronghead Gilbey the "mayor" and his aides, the choice spirits of the camp, considered that they had run things very well by themselves. After the last accident, Black Mag had promptly been invited to leave town. What more could they do? Moreover, that unfortunate affair was now six weeks old, and in the meantime not so much as a pistol-shot had disturbed the peace of the deep valley. And had they not Stella Gurney to preside over them like a good genius?

In a way, difficult to explain, but none the less clear to all, it seemed like an insult to Stella the good, the gentle, the adorable, to send the police to Mile Ninety-Two. As if there could be any rough work where she was!

Had Kenaston on his coming betrayed a vulnerable spot, there is no doubt they would have led him a dog's life, but in spite of his youth he proved to be an instrument of fine temper. The stiffness of his back, the steadiness of his eye and his unquestionable "squareness" won their respect in spite of themselves, and they contented them with letting him alone. Kenaston was merely sent to Coventry. They were scrupulously polite. All conversation ceased at his approach. None ever approached his cabin.

Outwardly Kenaston gave no sign of being aware of anything inimical in their attitude. He, too, according to the traditions of the force, was polite and offhand to all. Nevertheless it cut deep. He liked the boys. They were his kind. He greatly desired to make friends.

In especial there was Curly Briscoe, the only other young fellow at Mile Ninety-Two, a rollicking, reckless blade, a songster and a story-teller by the fire; in short, the idol of camp. Kenaston was strongly attracted to one so likable, so different from himself. But Briscoe joined with the others of course in boycotting the policeman, and Kenaston would sooner have cut off his hand than have held it out to one who scorned him.

TO-NIGHT he was feeling his ostracism with especial keenness. It had been a momentous day in camp, and he had been pointedly excluded from any share in the doings. He thought that for one day they might have let down the bars.

The occasion was this: Old man Gurney, Stella's father, had passed in his checks the day before—without compulsion—and to-day he had been laid away in the fourth grave in the mountainside above camp.

The first natural death in camp was not to be allowed to pass without an appropriate celebration. The fact that a man actually died in bed to their minds went a good way toward proving the firm establishment of order. They held it a rebuke to the policeman. No detail proper to the occasion had been omitted.

Jim Kettle had donated a full black suit to clothe the corpse. They had made him a coffin out of pine boards with black calico out of the store neatly tacked over it. Stronghead had conducted the services beside the grave, not according to the prayer-book perhaps, because there was none in camp, but none the less impressively. Curly Briscoe, who remembered parts of some hymns, had rehearsed the boys throughout the previous night, and what lines he couldn't remember, they extemporized.

On the whole, it had been a notable day, and Kenaston had had no share in it. His heart was very sore.

At present the boys were all gathered in Stronghead's stopping-house, the last shack down the row from the barracks, and the largest edifice in town. Out of respect to the bereaved daughter in a neighboring shack, their voices were somewhat restrained; nevertheless it was clear to Kenaston, from a certain ring of abandon in the sound, that contraband spirits were circulating. Whether out of pride, generosity, good sense or a little of all three, he would not interfere to-night. There are times when the most efficient constable does well to close his eyes or his ears.

It should not be supposed that there was any poignant grief in camp on account of the demise of old Gurney. Anybody's funeral would have done as well—or anybody's wedding. It was merely that the affair opened the emotional valve, which provides such relief and refreshment to men, be they the hardest heads in camp. As for grieving, it was considered that even his daughter had no great call to do that. He had been a disreputable, ill-conditioned old wretch, a burden to himself and a shame to the lovely Stella. The forms of grief were displayed, but secretly the feeling was—a good riddance!

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One day in May, Gurney and his daughter had appeared unheralded at Mile Ninety-Two. It might reasonably have been asked why an old man suffering from a complication of diseases resulting from an evil life should have chosen such a remote and rough asylum in which to make an end, but on the frontier no one asks such questions. They were glad enough to get the girl. Her presence in camp was like a benediction.

She was as rare and pretty as a pale Spring flower, and as sweet as a dream of home to them. In all the country up and down the line there was nothing even remotely approaching her like. They felt that they had no right to her, that they enjoyed her on sufferance, and at first every man held his breath and walked on tiptoe for fear of scaring her away.

Later she spread a table in her father's shack and served meals to all at six bits a man. Such meals! Such a hostess! They became more than ever terrified of losing her. Every man in camp was in love with her, according to his own style, but it was the kind of love that conceived no jealousy of the good-looking and irresistible young Curly Briscoe, when he appeared to be forging ahead in the running.

To the other men it seemed the most natural thing, the young pair of them. They hoped, now that she need no longer wait on her father, she would give in to Curly, and remain at Mile Ninety-Two to cheer their eyes and their hearts with her presence.

SO MUCH for the situation in camp on this particular night in July. By and by Kenaston slammed his book shut, and went outside. It was ten o'clock, and in that high latitude only now beginning to grow dark. He turned in the other direction from the convivial sounds that mocked him, and to escape them strode out of camp by the tote-road, through the timber, across the new grade and down hill toward Banjo Creek.

He was as sore at heart as a new boy at school, and he hotly resented the softness. That he, a full-grown man, should find himself moping like a girl was intolerable! His resentment naturally turned against the men who had rebuffed him.

In this mood he was surprised upon approaching the creek to see one of the boys sitting on a log at the end of the bridge, his back bowed, his arms on his knees and his head buried in his arms. He presently made out that it was Curly Briscoe, the reckless, the laughter-loving, whom he had supposed was at that moment either leading the festivities in Stronghead's shack or comforting Stella in hers. Great was his astonishment at seeing him thus.

Curly was sunk so deep in his painful thoughts he did not hear the other man coming until he was fairly upon him. Then he sprang up, ashamed and furious to be caught in such an attitude. His face, ordinarily as smooth and unlined as Kenaston's own, and always smiling at the corners of his mouth, was now haggard with pain, and with a suspicious redness about the eyes. It was intolerable to him to have the other man see this.

"What are you spying around here for?"

The hot blood rushed into Kenaston's face. He, too, was spoiling for trouble.

"Spying nothing!" he retorted. "What's biting you? Is this your private park?"

A quarrel flared up like a fire in tow. There was no sense or reason to it, only that each rejoiced to find an object to wreak his soreness upon. Oaths and epithets were cast back and forth. Curly was the readier of speech; his was the hotter anger; Kenaston's slower and deadlier.

"Why don't you arrest me," sneered Curly at length, "for insulting the sacred red coat of the force! You lobster! You stiff-neck! You spy! You think you're a little gorramighty, don't you, with your shoulder-straps and your spurs and your tin carbine! The sight of you's enough to make a man sick!"

Kenaston's answer was to tear off the red coat and fling it on the ground.

"I don't have to arrest you," he cried. "I'll beat you on my own account, and beat you good! Take off your coat!"

It was already off. The cartridge-belt, and the big .44 that Curly carried for decorative purposes, followed.

"Good!" cried Curly. "Come out on the bridge. The road's too cut up."

The bridge was a simple corduroy affair about twelve feet wide and twice as long, without guard or string-piece. Hot weather had swollen the snow-fed stream, and it swirled swiftly and noiselessly underneath, risen to within an inch or two of the supporting log girders. On either shore,

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immense spruce-trees came down to the water's edge.

In the center of the bridge the two young men, watching each other like cats, sparred for an opening. They were well enough matched. Curly was a little heavier, but Kenaston had an advantage in height. In their style there was a decided contrast, for the curls which gave the one his name were close and black and lustrous all over his head; his skin was dark and he had gleaming white teeth that he was prone to show. On the other hand, Kenaston was as blond as a Norseman.

A blow was struck, and instantly returned, and forthwith the higher human attributes deserted them. They fought like males of any species. It was a well-bred pair, and no sound escaped them. Their faces were as grim as stone. Only their eyes blazed. They stumbled and staggered over the round logs that provided their footing, and most of the blows went wild.

Finally Curly sprang back.

"Time!" he cried. "Take off your boots."

They squatted on the bridge and, hot to be at each other again, tore off their boots and flung them up on the bank. Curly was first on his feet.

"Come on, Rosy-Cheeks!" he taunted. "Come on, and I'll put a man's mark on your pretty phiz! Too bad you weren't a girl, Kenaston."

The trooper, busy with the long laces of his Strathcona boots, made no answer. Throughout, he kept his head and his science better than the other. They went to it again, their stockinged feet getting a better grip on the corduroy. A clean blow on Curly's jaw made a crack like two stones clapped together, and jerked his head back between his shoulders.

Kenaston followed it with his left, and Curly clinched to save himself. They wrestled and swayed with heaving breasts. This, the second and final round, did not go to full time. They were blind to the unguarded edge of the bridge. They swayed to the projecting ends of the loose logs, which promptly rose and dropped the pair of them neatly into the water.

The current swept them under the bridge, bumping their heads on the log girders. They emerged half-drowned into the air on the other side and, striking out, scrambled ashore side by side. They stood up, a little dazed, thoroughly chilled of their hot blood, and streaming with water. They surveyed each other for a moment and then the reaction set in. Struck simultaneously by the other's comic, dripping aspect, both burst out laughing.

"WHAT was it all about?" said Curly when he could speak.

"Hanged if I know!" returned Kenaston.

Their right hands shot out and gripped.

"Quits, then!" they said.

"We'll never hear the end of this when the fellows find out," said Curly ruefully.

"They'll never learn from me," said Kenaston.

"But I've got to go to Stronghead's to change. How can I keep it from them?"

Kenaston hesitated, glancing at the other diffidently.

"Come to my shack," he suggested very offhand. "I'll build a fire, and we can dry out beside it. The boys are good for all night at Stronghead's with the booze."

"Booze?" said Curly, with a quick look.

"Sure. Anybody could tell by their voices."

"If you think so, why don't you go down and confiscate it?"

Kenaston scowled.

"To-night? What do you think I am?" he muttered. "If there's any left to-morrow I'll get it."

Curly looked at him approvingly.

"You're almost human!" he said.

Picking up their boots, they made their way to Kenaston's shack. Ten minutes later they were sitting on the floor before a blaze in Kenaston's chimney that caused the steam to rise gratefully from their wet clothes.

Filling their pipes with the careful attention befitting the ceremony, they were presently puffing in unison. A silence fell upon them. Curly stared at the fire, and Kenaston glanced sideways at Curly. His trouble, whatever it was, sat with Curly again, and his face was heavy and drawn in the firelight. The fact that he made no effort to hide it now encouraged Kenaston to seek his confidence.

Such silences work more potently than speech. Something had softened in them both. A sense of common youth and pain wove a bond between them as they sat. The firelight and the tobacco-smoke were propitious. It dimly suggested itself to

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Kenaston that the way to win the other man's confidence was to offer his own.

"Seems pretty good to have a fellow come in to smoke," he said with gruff diffidence. "You're the first that's been in here."

Curly bestirred himself to explain.

"It was all made up before you came," he said deprecatingly. "The boys were sore about the police being sent. They haven't anything against you personally."

"Sure, I understand," said Kenaston quickly. "I don't blame them. I have to make good of course. I will in the end."

There was another silence while they smoked.

"I've got to make good," Kenaston presently went on. "You see this is all on my own. I lit out from home to 'list in the police. My father's a lawyer, a big gun in the East. He expected me to go in for it. I couldn't. Cities and offices and courts would kill me. I must have the open."

"Same here," said Curly. "You suffocate in the streets!"

"I tell you it hurt to go against the old man," Kenaston went on. "He's always been so square and decent to me. But he couldn't understand this. I haven't heard from him since I left. You see, I've got to make good, to show him. He'll be the first to help me to a commission when I do."

Presently Kenaston, getting up, made a trip to the table and back.

"Here's his picture," he said, offering it abruptly.

Curly looked at it with a kind of shy interest.

"Some time I'll bring up my pictures to show you," he growled. "My governor's dead. He was a parson. I have to keep that dark around here!"

"How old are you?" asked Kenaston by and by.

"Twenty-two."

"That's my age, too."

They measured each other with sidelong glances.

"It's all right to have some one your own age to talk to," said Curly clumsily. "With the boys up here I have to keep my end up, of course, and carry on and never let anything show But fellows of the same age—why that's different. They're up against the same things; they understand each other."

"Sure!" said Kenaston. "When I came into camp I spotted you first go."

THUS was the ice melted. Very shamefacedly they indulged themselves in the rare and delicious luxury of the softer feelings, with many a guilty look over their shoulders, as it were. As a result they were drawn together like partners in sin.

Hour succeeded hour, and uncounted pipes of Kenaston's tobacco were smoked. They told each other all about the people at home, the pranks they had played at school and, with suitable precautions of mystery, the girls they had kissed.

More than once they approached by halting and embarrassed stages to the door of Curly's secret, only to sheer off quickly in alarm. But it was bound to be opened in the end.

"I suppose you wonder what I was doing down there by the bridge," said Curly gruffly.

"Don't wonder anything," said Kenaston uncomfortably. "It's none of my business."

"It is if I want to tell you," said Curly aggressively.

The trooper was silent.

After a while Curly said with a poor attempt to carry it off lightly:

"It's the usual thing, of course."

"A girl?"

Curly nodded.

"Stella?"

He nodded again.

"I thought you were all right there."

Curly sprang to his feet, and flung back and forth in the room.

"All right!" he burst out bitterly. "All-right-crazy, that's what I am! She's in my blood! I can't think of anything else night or day! She thrusts me down to toast on the hottest grid in hell! These good women can be stony!"

He strode up and down, struggling to control himself. By and by he came and sat down beside Kenaston again.

"When we're kids we think we're attracted by girls," he went on more quietly. "Almost any girl will do then. We think we're crazy about this one or that. It's fun. It's nothing like this. I never felt anything like this before. It's like a knife sticking through me! I think she likes me. That's the worst of it; that's what perplexes me. She doesn't keep me away from her. We

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talk about everything. There never was a woman like her. She's pretty enough to drive a man mad with wanting her, and she's got a mind, a soul, whatever you call it. She understands what you feel before you say it.

"I'm sure she likes me—loves me, maybe. That makes my head spin. Once when she thought a tree had fallen on my leg she came running, white as paper. I wish it had smashed me! She says it's friendship. What is there in friendship for a man? She talks to me, and generally I can hold myself in. But the more I hold myself in the worse it gets. What's the use? She won't let me—not so much as touch her hand! To-night I grabbed hold of her; I couldn't help it. I won't do it again.

"There's something in the way. I don't know what it is. She won't tell me. You'd think that now with her father gone, and she all alone, she'd let me take care of her. I've plenty to keep her on. But there's something in the way of it. I'm near crazy not knowing what it is. To-night I said I'd have her anyway. She said—she said she'd kill herself if I didn't let her be. She's the kind to keep her word. No woman ever crossed my will before. She's like steel and ice and granite. I'm up against it. I don't know what to do!"

CURLY came to a full stop, and Kenaston, putting out his hand, gripped his shoulder hard. He offered him the sympathy which has no words. There was a long silence by the fire. Gradually Curly quieted down.

"I suppose you think I'm a fool," he muttered at last, "blubbing everything out like that."

Kenaston scowled fiercely.

"Ah, cut it out!" he growled. "You know —— well I don't think so."

Curly was more comforted than he would show.

"Well, I feel a lot better getting it off my chest," he said trying to be offhand.

Kenaston struggled with his embarrassment, and finally blurted out:

"If she likes you, and you understand each other, it's bound to come right. And anybody could see she likes you."

They smoked another pipeful apiece, without saying anything, without needing to say anything more. At last dawn began to whiten the window-panes, and Curly knocked the ashes out on the hearth.

"I must get along," he said.

Kenaston went with him to the door. He lingered, and their hands gripped.

"It's pals, then," said Curly, looking away.

"Pals to a finish," mumbled Kenaston.

"We can't let on," said Curly. "The boys would think I——"

"Sure," said Kenaston. "I'm not supposed to make any particular friends either. They don't do it outside the service."

"But we'll get together some time and talk, eh?"

"Sure thing!"

"Good night, old man."

"Good night, old man."

CHAPTER II

THE SHOOTING

AT NOON next day, Baldy Red Hafner drove into Mile Ninety-Two. Baldy Red spent his time flitting from camp to camp along the line, and wherever he appeared trouble followed on his heels. It was upon his first appearance at Mile Ninety-Two that the accident had occurred which gave the place its bad name. He drove up in his democrat, the smartest trap on the tote-road and, announcing his intention of staying a while, sent his team back. Baldy was a capitalist and a man of leisure. Up and down the line he had a dozen teams contributing to his support.

Baldy commanded mysterious sources of alcohol and, notwithstanding the vigilance of the police, was rarely seen sober. Indeed, he carried drunkenness like a plague wherever he went. Kenaston was on hand when he alighted from his rig. The trooper neatly and expeditiously "frisked" his baggage, producing four full bottles, which he smashed forthwith on the wagon-tires.

The bystanders groaned as the volatile odor spread upon the air, and Baldy swore in his picturesque way, but no demonstration was made against Kenaston, because their sense of fairness forced them to concede that that was what the young trooper was there for.

While Baldy Red had the smartest outfit on the line, there was nothing smart in his own aspect. He was middle-aged and he had the look of an unwholesome specimen preserved in wood-alcohol. His nickname

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described two salient points of his appearance. His features seemed to have run together in a general flabbiness. He was obese and unclean. He had a truculent disposition, and usually bore the marks of recent encounters. At present his bald pate showed prominent abrasions, and his shirt-front gory stains.

Rough as they were, there was hardly a man at Ninety-Two whose secret soul did not recoil in disgust from this visitor. But the law of the frontier reads: Thou shalt not pretend to be better than the worst. Consequently they were obliged to make Baldy Red welcome, and to clap him on the back with a kind of rough scorn. They made the most of Baldy's one virtue—he was unquestionably game.

Baldy was given the freedom of Stronghead's place, and the spirit of conviviality in camp received a fresh impetus, howsoever Kenaston had deprived them of the wherewithal to maintain it. The trooper returned to his shack, dwelling a little bitterly on the fact that a thing like Baldy was welcome where he was not.

Working around his own place during the afternoon, he gradually became aware from afar that Baldy must have a more serious aim than mere conviviality in this visit. Long and quiet-voiced conferences were held in Stronghead's shack. There was a deal of coming and going, and messengers sent to bring in the boys who were working around camp. From their expressions it was clear that matters of serious import were going forward. Finally, to Kenaston's surprise, something apparently happened to arrest the general good-will toward the newcomer.

SHORTLY before supper-time Baldy appeared at the door of the barracks, lugging his dunnage and grinning deprecatingly.

"I'd like to put up with you, pardner," he said to Kenaston with an ingratiating air. "Me and Stronghead don't jibe. His place ain't big enough for the two of us together.

According to another law of the frontier, Kenaston was obliged to take him in, which he did, masking his repugnance. The trooper was fastidious, and fastidiousness is encouraged in the service.

Thanks to the confiscation of his liquor, Baldy was more nearly sober than he had known himself in some time. He exerted himself to be agreeable according to his lights. He was a handy man about camp, and he cooked a worthy supper which they discussed together, Baldy bragging of his unspeakable exploits, while the young trooper schooled his gorge from rising. His meals in solitude were greatly preferable to this.

Soon after they had finished eating, Wingy Degnon came up from Stronghead's place with a summons for Baldy, and the two of them went back together. Kenaston opened the door and the window to their widest, and built a fire in the chimney to purify the place. So great was his relief at getting rid of his guest that it failed to occur to him that in view of the well-known reputation of Baldy for making trouble it would have been as well to inquire into the nature of the business that was concerning the whole camp. He blamed himself for this later.

To help make clear the subsequent occurrences of this night it is necessary to lay out the setting a little more particularly. As you arrived at Mile Ninety-Two from down the line, the barracks was the first shack you came to. It was on the left-hand side of the tote-road. Beyond, half a score buildings straggled along both sides, and halfway down the hill was Joe Kettle's store on the right, with the Japanese Short-Order Restaurant almost opposite. Stronghead Gilbey's stopping-house—or inn—was at the bottom of the slight hill, the last group of buildings in camp.

All the shacks were of the same temporary character, with walls of logs and canvas roofs. When the head of construction should be advanced, everybody expected to move on. Humbler shacks and tents were erected in the clearing, back from the road. The Gurneys' eating-house stood by itself, opposite the barracks and about three hundred yards away.

The careless architects of the camp had not regarded its natural beauties. To clear the site they had allowed a controlled fire to run through the bush, burning out the undergrowth and scorching the hearts of the great pines, which now raised their naked sticks, incredibly tall and thin, and leaning drunkenly this way and that. Looking down the slope one had a glimpse of the magnificent Mount Ellerslie, guarding the summit of the pass.

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ONCE more Kenaston sat down to his book in the long twilight, and once more his attention wandered. But he was happier to-night, thinking of Curly's confidences of the night before, and gloating in the possession of a friend. Through the window in front of him he could see the Gurney shack. By and by, as if his thoughts had evoked her, Stella came to the door and looked about. Kenaston was too far away to read her face, but something in her pose, the thrust forward of the head, the tense arms, suggested a disquieted mind. She went in.

Presently she came out again and, walking with rapid, uneven steps, headed obliquely across the clearing toward the road where it disappeared into the bush. Kenaston instinctively got up. There was nothing on that side of camp except the creek and the next camp nine miles away. It was possible she might be going to keep tryst with Curly. Kenaston blushed at the thought of thrusting himself on them. Nevertheless a great uneasiness filled him. The girl's crouched, hurrying attitude suggested desperation. He put his boyish diffidence away and, as she disappeared among the trees, he set off after her.

In the fragrant gloom of the tall pines absolute silence reigned; not a rustle, not a movement, not a chirp; no hint of the companionable suggestions of teeming nights at home. To Kenaston, hurrying with strained ears, this stillness was broken by a dreadful, soft cry, wrung from a woman's tortured breast.

He broke into a run. He caught sight of her dress. She was running too, with head down and arms outstretched in front of her, crying as she went.

She gained the bridge. She did not hear him behind her. In the middle of it she paused for a second and, flinging up her head and her arms in wild abandon, cast herself into the water. At the same instant Kenaston's foot spurned the bridge.

She had gone off the up-stream side and was carried under. He flung himself down full length on the logs at the other side, and watched for her to reappear; watched for an age it seemed to him, with a picture of the satiny, eddying, dimpled current biting into his brain as with acid. Finally, as he was gathering himself to plunge in, he saw her face floating a little under the surface, merely a suggestion of a white oval, remote, behind a clouded glass. He snatched for her, caught her and pulled her out with a sob of relief.

She had been submerged for no longer than a few seconds, but she lay limp in his arms, and scarcely conscious. When she got her breath she began to whimper pitifully, and clung to him with the soft urgency of a baby. The touch of her hands stirred something very deep in him, something hitherto unguessed by him.

He hurried her back to her cabin. In the outer room he laid her in the rude easy-chair the boys had knocked together for the old man to die in. He stood off looking at her in a quandary; cracking his knuckles, frowning, blushing, wondering what to do next.

"Look here!" he said gruffly. "You've got to take off your things and get into bed quick!"

The girl half turned in the chair and hid her face from him in her arm.

"Go away! Let me be!"

"If you don't do what I tell you I'll have to get Mayzell to come and take care of you —Black Mag's gone—" he went on doggedly, "and it will be all over camp to-morrow."

The girl shrank at the sound of the other woman's name.

"No! No!" she murmured.

"Then get into bed and no one will know but me."

She rose obediently, and went waveringly toward the inner room.

He hastened across to his own shack for his medicine-kit, keeping an eye over his shoulder meanwhile to make sure she did not escape again. There was but the one door to the Gurney shack Returning, there was no answer to his knock, and he looked in. Her clothes lay in a wet heap outside the doorway to the inner room. At that door he spoke her name, and finally lifted the curtain with a bashful, frowning brow. Seeing her safe in bed his face cleared. But, upon taking in the fact of her wet hair matted on the pillow, he frowned again.

"You'll get your death," he muttered.

In the kitchen he built up the fire in the stove, and hung her clothes to dry. Warming a towel that he found, he carried it into the other room, and knelt at the head of her cot. He groped with inexpert fingers for the pins that remained in her hair, and spread the masses of it over the top of the pillow.

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He had never seen such hair, much less dreamed of touching it. It was of the darkest shade of brown, a color most beautiful in the sight of his blue eyes; thick, soft and full of life. As it gradually dried between his hands it fluffed and crinkled, and he was conscious of an odd desire to bury his face in it.

Her face against the pillow was like a lily pinned on a white shroud. He thought the long, curved lashes lying on her cheeks made a touch of beauty more keen than anything he had ever felt. There was a piteous droop to the corners of her pale lips.

He thought she slept, she was so still, but by and by he saw a pair of tears steal under the corners of her lowered eyelids and roll over her temples into her hair.

The sight caused him a surprising pang.

"Don't fret," he said gruffly. "You're all right now."

When her hair was dry, he sat down beside her bed, gazing at her and wondering greatly what unhappy circumstances could have brought so gentle and lovable a creature to the brink of despair. He never doubted it must be the same thing that parted her from Curly. He linked them together in his mind—his friend and his friend's love. The fact that she was forever forbidden to himself invested her in Kenaston's eyes with a pure spirituality that it is impossible for a man to feel toward any object that he hopes ever to possess.

"LOOK here," he said at last. "I don't want to bother you, but we've got to talk a little. I'm here to see that things go right. If anybody has done you wrong, tell me."

"The law can't help me," she whispered.

Kenaston blushed.

"I didn't mean it that way," he said quickly. "Hang the law! Tell me as a pal. You can talk to me just the same as if you were another man. Tell me as Curly's pal, if you like."

Her eyes opened wide at that. "You—you are Curly's friend?" she whispered breathlessly.

"To the limit. We have shaken on it."

"Oh, I'm glad of that," she breathed.

"But he doesn't know what's the matter any more than me," pursued Kenaston. "How can we help you if we don't know?"

She turned her head away, and closed her eyes.

"Nobody can help me," she whispered.

Kenaston was filled with a kind of sympathetic rage at her obstinacy.

"Well, I can't make you tell me," he blurted out. "What am I going to do with you anyway? I can't leave you unless you give me your word you won't try it again."

"I promise," she murmured. "I—I was out of my mind, I guess." His harshness unnerved her. "Don't think too badly of me," she went on falteringly. "Nobody knows what I have been through! And what I have to go through with still! It's horrible! Don't think too badly of me!"

Sobs rose and choked her speech. The sound of the catch in her throat was like a stab to Kenaston. The sight of the frail and tortured little thing maddened him. He could not express himself, only scowl, and clench his hands and growl.

"Who thinks badly of you! I—we—Curly and I would give our lives to help you. Tell me who's hurting you so!"

"I can't! I can't! It would only make trouble! Don't torture me!"

Her head turned ceaselessly from side to side on the pillow, and one hand wandered restlessly outside the blanket, palm up. It suddenly came to Kenaston that it was asking for his hand, and he gripped it hard. Feeling the strength-giving firmness, she sighed, and gradually recovered control of herself.

"You're so good to me!"

"Cut that out!" said Kenaston gruffly. "You'd do as much for me I guess."

The catch in her breath came at longer intervals, with deep sighs between. Finally, he saw that she was really asleep—worn out by her pain. Occasionally her hand stirred faintly within his, as if to make sure he was still there. How long he sat there, he could not have told. His extended arm grew stiff to the breaking-point. No wiser than in the beginning, he continued to beat his brains for a solution to the painful mystery that eluded him. Finally he dozed off.

They were roused simultaneously by a sound of distant angry voices coming through the window from the direction of Stronghead's place. Stella started up in bed with wide eyes.

"Go! Go quickly!" she cried, urging him with her hands. "They've found out! They're quarreling. There'll be murder done!"

Kenaston needed no second command.

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He sprang through the outer room, and through the door. Stella, careless of her bare feet and streaming hair, made to follow. He ordered her back. She paid no attention, but on the threshold of her house she tottered, and sank down in a heap. He dared not stop to look after her.

He ran by the shack of the woman called Mayzell. Attracted by the quarreling voices, she was listening in her doorway. Without pausing Kenaston called to her:

"Stella's sick. Go back there."

Mayzell had nothing in common with Stella, but she was human and warm-hearted. Without question she gathered up her elaborate tea-gown and ran in the other direction.

AS HE approached the stopping-house, Kenaston heard Stronghead's grim voice raised in cold and biting invective, and Baldy Red's obscene and furious replies. No word was dropped to give him a clue. They were simply raking up each the other's past. When he flung the door open silence descended as sudden and complete as darkness upon the blowing-out of a light.

Stronghead was the first to break it. He muttered, scowling:

"Hanged if I didn't forget the redcoat."

Kenaston looked about him. The rough interior was set out very much as if a trial were in progress. At his left sat Baldy, on a box apart from all the others. Down the room Stronghead faced him, sitting at the deal-table they played cards on. A pair of oil-lamps with bright reflectors suspended against the opposite wall threw a strong light on these two. Wingy Degnon, Jim Kettle, Curly Briscoe and others stood behind Stronghead's chair.

Along the other side of the room ran a counter suspiciously like a bar, though theoretically no drinks were served over it. On this counter, dangling their feet, perched half a score more of the leading spirits of the camp, giving the effect of a jury. There was another door at the far end of the room, which stood open, and on the sill sat Stronghead's handsome half-breed wife with an expression of self-conscious apathy, enough in itself to warn Kenaston.

Baldy was flushed, snarling, defiant, and perfectly sober. Stronghead had perfect control, and nothing was to be read in his face.

Stronghead was a tall, lean, sandy pioneer, with an ironic droop to one side of his mouth, and eyes like points of steel. Sardonic was the keynote of his speech. The strength of a giant with the simplicity of a babe, a blind foe and an equally blind friend, "Wronghead" would have served him almost as well for a name.

Kenaston naturally addressed himself to him.

"What's going on here?" he demanded.

Stronghead stroked his prominent chin, and his eyes twinkled.

"It's a fine night, constable," he drawled. "Never see so many stars since the night I was cracked on the nut with a brandy-bottle down to Fox Creek in the old bad-days. Young men ought to study asteronomy. It develops the neck muscles."

A loud guffaw greeted this sally. Everybody laughed but Baldy and Curly Briscoe. Kenaston's cheeks burned, but his eyes never faltered from Stronghead's. Waiting until the laughter died away, he said firmly:

"Very funny. But it doesn't apply. I have a right to ask what's going on here, and you know it. And you know I have a force behind me that will back me to the limit. You call yourself the mayor of this place, and you claim you're going to build it up, and give it a good name. All right. I'm here to help you. But if you defy the law and encourage these men to defy the law we'll wipe you out like figures on a kid's slate."

Stronghead's expression changed. But no one could ever be certain if he meant what he said—perhaps not even himself.

"Fairly spoke," he said with a bob of the head that was an acknowledgment of Kenaston's manhood. "I respect an outspoken man whether he wears a red coat or none. Speaking straight myself, I tell you this is not a case for the police. This is a private matter. I ask you fair to go back to your shack and leave me to settle my own matters in my own house."

Kenaston, remembering Stella's cry, was not so easily to be put off.

"Sorry," he said curtly. "This is a public house and this is a public meeting. I can't take my directions from you."

Stronghead shrugged, and looked significantly down the line of men perched on the bar.

Kenaston turned abruptly.

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"Baldy, what's the matter here?" he asked.

"None of your —— business," snarled Baldy. "I can take care of myself."

There was no laughter at this. All the men looked at Baldy with a calm air that embraced and exceeded disdain.

"He's a foul brute," said Stronghead coolly. "Let him go at that."

Baldy's answer was a stream of abuse directed at Stronghead, in which, however, there was no hint as to the particular cause of their dispute.

Stronghead took it unruffled.

"I'll attend to you directly," he said.

Kenaston's eyes traveled keenly all around the circle. Curly avoided his look with evident discomfort. Pride or generosity, or both, would not permit the trooper to appeal directly to his friend.

"Look here, men," he said to the crowd generally, "you all know what the force stands for, and what comes of setting yourselves against it. Who will tell me what is the trouble here?"

There was no answer. Kenaston saw a box near the door, and sat down upon it, facing Stronghead.

"Very well," he said. "Here I stay."

THERE was a pause. One would almost have said that Stronghead's grim face betrayed reluctance. Finally he looked at the men behind Kenaston again, and four of them let themselves quietly to the floor. Kenaston heard them coming and sprang up to face them, but too late. They were already on him. He struggled manfully, but he could do nothing against four. They bore him to the floor.

Curly, unable to bear the sight, abruptly left the shack by the back door. Everybody else looked on with the same oddly calm air. There was no sound except the scuffling of their feet and their heavy breathing. They made no attempt to strike Kenaston. It was over immediately. They got him down, and sat on his arms and legs.

Without any suggestion, the half-breed woman unconcernedly brought a length of clothesline, and the trooper was expeditiously and firmly bound. The four men lifted him up and bore him ignominiously out of the door and up the road. He heard Stronghead tell off Wingy Degnon to watch him until morning. As yet amazement and a sense of outrage had Kenaston all agape. He set his teeth and writhed silently in his bonds as they bore him jogging and stumbling up-road. He could not but have a feeling that it was all a joke or a bad dream.

The four dropped him on his own bed and made off. Wingy Degnon remained. Kenaston, who was sparing of speech at all times, felt the uselessness of parleying with him, and kept his mouth shut. He ceased to struggle, and with infinite sly patience applied himself to working his hands free.

Wingy paced the room at no pains to conceal his ill-temper at being excluded from the rest of the doings below. He let the door stand open, and often went outside to listen. But evidently, having taken warning from the first interruption, they had closed windows and doors, and not a sound was to be heard.

After a long time the voices suddenly became audible again, not raised in anger, but level and imperative, as of those who have serious business in hand. They were too far off for Kenaston to make out anything of what was said; it was only the stillness of the night that enabled him to hear at all.

From the nature of the sounds it was evident the men were streaming out of Stronghead's shack. Apparently they stood about outside for a while, talking low-voiced, and then a sudden, significant hush descended on them. Wingy came inside quickly and closed the door, showing a scared face.

An occult sense warned Kenaston of what was coming. His heart began to thump. Bound as he was, he managed to raise himself. Three shots rang out and went echoing down the still valley; one shot, a brief pause and two more almost as one.

Wingy ran outside again. Kenaston groaned and twisted impotently in his bonds. The shock to him was almost as if the bullets had found a mark in his own body. A shooting, murder perhaps, within his very hearing, and he not there to prevent it! Well, he knew there was no excuse to be made to his officers for this! He had failed, and disgrace was spelled out in burning letters before his eyes.

Wingy Degnon ran in, grinning from ear to ear, and capered grotesquely about the room.

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CHAPTER III

MISSING

KENASTON was not set free until seven o'clock next morning. At that hour Wingy Degnon cut his bonds, grinning, and swiftly decamped. Kenaston went to his door and looked out, stretching his cramped body, chafing his swollen wrists and ankles. The quiet scene of nature—rough clearing, surrounding forest, dark mountainsides and shining peaks all bathed in the brilliant sunshine—seemed to scout the violent events of the night, and once more he had a fleeting feeling that he must have dreamed it. But his heart was too sore—likewise his limbs. A great stillness prevailed around the shacks, a suspicious stillness. There was no one in sight.

Beginning his search he found every man who had been present in Stronghead's shack ostentatiously at work. One after another he checked them off until there was only one remaining unaccounted for—Baldy Red Hafner. He did not expect to find Baldy. His absence was eloquent of what had happened. With all the sunshine there was a smell of death about Mile Ninety-Two that morning.

Kenaston went to Stronghead. The big man was waiting for him with his sardonic smile. He was alone in his place, laboriously casting up the queer accounts he kept. Kenaston formally demanded to know what had happened.

"That strikes me as a waste of breath," drawled Stronghead, without animosity. "What for would I take the trouble of tying you up if I wanted you to know?"

"I want to put you squarely on record," said Kenaston, tight-lipped. "Think of the consequences before you answer. Will you tell me what happened?"

"I have thought of the consequences," said Stronghead calmly, "and I will not tell you what happened."

The blood rushed to Kenaston's face; the limit of his self-control was reached.

"You're a fool, Stronghead!" he burst out bitterly. "You can't buck the whole force, with the power of the Government behind it. You've got ahead of me. You've ruined me. But there are hundreds to take my place. Do you think they'll let it drop here?"

"As to ruining you," interrupted Stronghead with a kind of compunction, "if it comes to a show-down I'll tell the truth, and the truth won't ruin you. I've got nothing against you."

"What do I care about that?" Kenaston flung out. "You're acting the part of a fool. It won't do you any good. Murder will out!"

Stronghead was betrayed into a sharp movement.

"Not so fast with your 'murder,' young fellow!" he said quickly. "You can take it from me there's been no murder done."

"Where's Baldy Hafner, then?"

Stronghead shrugged.

"Don't ask me. I'm not his keeper."

"Killing then, if you like the word better."

"You can't prove no killing without a corpse," drawled Stronghead.

"I'll find it, don't you fear," cried Kenaston. "I've got enough to hold you without it, with what I heard last night, and the shots and the disappearance of Baldy."

"Arrest me, eh?" drawled Stronghead with almost a fatherly air. "Why, go as far as you like. Better not lock me up, though. Only make trouble with the boys. I'm known, and my word has its value. I give you my word I will not leave this place. I'll be here when you want me."

Kenaston flung away, baffled. The worst of it was he had a sneaking sympathy for the old man, a suspicion that somehow Stronghead was in the right.

Certainly Stronghead believed he was. The fact robbed Kenaston of his own sureness. Altogether, the situation was too complicated for his simple straightforwardness. Nothing was as he had a right to expect it to be, and he was lost in a maze.

HE DOGGEDLY pursued his investigation, questioning one man after another. According to their several natures, they either evaded his questions, or lied, or remained obstinately mum. Not a scrap of information was forthcoming. Kenaston watched them well, too. In not one of them was there any betrayal of a sense of guilt or remorse. They were grim, but it was with the satisfaction of an ugly job well done. Finally Kenaston came to Curly Briscoe. They were alone together.

"Say, I'm sorry," Curly said uncomfortably. "But what can I do? I don't take back anything I said the other night about

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friendship. Can I speak to you as a friend instead of a policeman?"

Kenaston was aware somehow that there were changes within his friend. Curly was excited and anxious, but there was a secret spring of gladness at work. He spoke from a lighter breast. His eye kindled covertly.

"Sure," said Kenaston gloomily.

"I don't want to lie to you," Curly went on. "Of course I know what happened last night, but I took an oath not to reveal it. You wouldn't have me break that?"

"No," said Kenaston.

"Don't look so down in the mouth," said Curly. "Nobody could blame you for what happened."

"Blame me!" said Kenaston bitterly. "There's nothing to say. I'll have to get out of the force, and go home with my tail between my legs!"

"Not on your life!" said Curly stoutly. "They can't spare good men as easy as that. Time enough to think about it when it happens!"

Kenaston went back to his shack, and wrote an exact account of the affair as he knew it. This he addressed to his nearest comrade, Stukeley at Mile Fifty-Three, with instructions to forward it to headquarters at Carlingford, and for Stukeley to come himself to his assistance. It is a saying that there are always three gangs on the grade; one coming, one going and one at work. Kenaston gave his letter to a discontented navvy on the way out, without much assurance that it would be delivered. As a matter of fact it was not. He considered riding the thirty-nine miles himself for Stukeley, but he did not dare abandon his chase and let the trail grow cold. The regular mail-carrier was not due for a week, and Sergeant Markley, on his monthly round, not for three weeks.

Kenaston searched the camp for telltale tracks. Up and down the road, all the way between his place and Stronghead's, there was a mess of footprints, suggesting nothing. Beyond Stronghead's there was only a rut or two in the road, no fresh footprints. Neither could he find any place up or down where a body of men had struck off the road. He was very sure they had not come up past his place, where he had lain awake all night with straining ears.

All this suggested to him that the body, if there was a body, must be concealed in one of the houses, and he transferred his search from door to door. No obstacle was raised. Indeed, the men cheerfully helped him to pull up the floors to make sure there was no freshly dug grave beneath. This advanced him not a jot.

Kenaston did not minimize Stella's important place in his mystery. He had not forgotten that she had instantly thought of murder when the quarrel started in Stronghead's place, but, dreading the ordeal, he left her until the last. He found the other woman still with her, and Stella refused to talk to him without her being present.

Plain terror showed in the girl's white face, and it was clear to Kenaston that she too had knowledge of what had happened. His formal questioning elicited nothing. He spared her anything further. He had a weaker vessel to resist him here, and he guessed he could probably break her down if he chose. Remembering her agony of the night before, he took his chance of being dismissed from the force rather than save himself that way.

The missing man's effects were still in Kenaston's shack. He went through them. It was only a traveling-outfit and, notwithstanding Baldy's means, a meager one; a few articles of clothing, blankets, cooking-utensils and grub. All Baldy's money went into whisky and horse-flesh. There were no papers, letters, memoranda, nothing to shed any light on the owner's taking-off.

He devoted the remaining hours of daylight to a minute and systematic search of the ground adjacent to camp. In his mind he laid out the territory in squares, and traversed every foot of one square before passing to the next. Not a sign of any disturbance of the earth rewarded him; not even an unexplained footprint.

Early on the following day he went to it again, spending fifteen hours on his feet with no better success. He completed an entire circuit of the camp for a space of three hundred yards all around, with an excursion down the tote-road beyond Stronghead's to the end of the grade.

For his years, Kenaston was no mean tracker. No rain had fallen and, even though they might have buried the body still farther off, he could not understand how they had succeeded in crossing the stretch he had searched—and carrying a heavy burden too, without leaving their tracks behind them.

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He was now completely at a loss. He began to have a despairing feeling that there must be hocus-pocus in it. A body is not so easy to dispose of. It was his first case, and his own youth and inexperience scared him. He sent out another letter for aid. This, he learned long afterward, got no farther than the first.

During these days Kenaston worked and vexed his brain in solitude, which is not good for a man, least of all for a young one. Lack of sleep and worry caused the blooming color that gave him his derisive nickname to fade. The worst of it was the inaction. There was nothing for him to do, having completed his search, but watch and wait, and hope against hope for aid from the outside.

He occasionally met Curly, who gave him a friendly look but no speech. It happened at this time that a continued spell of hot weather had swollen all the mountain streams. An important bridge had been washed out below, and no freight or supplies were coming through, so that the camp was more than ever cut off from the world.

AT THE end of the third day Kenaston was eating his lonesome supper by the window of his shack, when Curly came by outside and, pausing with a great pretense of looking over toward Stella's, said:

"The meat is running low. I'm going up on the mountain to-night to see if I can get a goat at daybreak. Like to come?"

Kenaston's heart leaped at the prospect of companionship.

"Sure!" he said.

"Bring a blanket and a little grub, and meet me in an hour at the mouth of Falls Creek. Better not let anybody see you coming."

Kenaston cleaned up his shack and, after letting the proper time elapse, struck straight back into the bush from his stable, to avoid observation. Reaching the shore of the little river in the bottom of the valley that collected the mountain streams one by one, he proceeded up-stream to the point Curly had named. A rough boom had been thrown across the river here to facilitate the crossing of the surveyors of the line.

Curly was waiting at the other side.

"Thought you needed a bit of an outing," he said offhand. "A man's got to change his thoughts or he goes stale."

"Right!" said Kenaston. "I needed this."

"Let's agree not to mention the case of Baldy till we get back, and avoid trouble," suggested Curly.

"Agreed!" said Kenaston. "I want to forget it for a while."

They applied themselves to their climb without further parley. For the first hour the way led up over the tangled, fallen tree-trunks alongside the bed of the stream. At the brink of the feathery cataract which gave the water-course its name they struck a trail worn in the first place by the mountain-goats themselves, who do not choose to go around obstructions, but over them.

Speech was impossible except at the moments when they paused to breathe, when Curly would call Kenaston's attention to a new glimpse of the valley, or Kenaston would point out an effect of the failing light over the westernmost spur of the mountain. The man of the open who deprecates the display of feeling, almost with horror, indulges himself this way. There is not much under the wide sky that escapes him.

"Great!" Kenaston would say; and "Bully!" from Curly.

CHAPTER IV

'A CAMP ABOVE THE TIMBER-LINE

SHORTLY before dark they reached their intended camping-place, at the edge of the timber-line, a couple of thousand feet above the valley. They built their fire in a gully at the base of the naked peak of rock. It made a cheerful glow in the dark, and bannock and tea after the climb was food for Olympians. Afterward there was tobacco-smoke and friendly speech. Speech, however, proved not so easy. Every avenue they chose led them sooner or later to the tabooed subject.

Curly turned his back on the fire to look down into the dim gulf beneath them. The pale Summer stars around the rim seemed to be under them where they sat.

"Gosh! you seem to get a fresh start up here!" he said. "The things that bothered you down there don't seem to matter so much."

"Sure!" Kenaston agreed. "It's great to find out suddenly how big the world is,

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and that there's something else besides——"

"Besides what?"

"Oh, the things that worry you till everything else is shut out," Kenaston explained vaguely. "I'll hate to go down again tomorrow. What are you looking at?"

"Oh, just to see if any of the lights in camp show. But it's too straight down."

"Her light?" suggested Kenaston slyly.

"If you like."

"How is she?"

"All right," Curly said with a constrained air that shut off further questioning along that line.

A silence resulted.

"Anyway," said Kenaston after a while, "we're good friends. Even this business can't spoil that."

"You bet it can't," said Curly. "Say, I'm sorry for the rotten position you're in. But it's bound to come right. I tell you there's been no wrong done."

"Easy," warned Kenaston. "We're getting pretty close!"

They rolled up side by side in their blankets. Curly, like a man with a mind at ease, immediately fell asleep; Kenaston not so quickly. But there was refreshment to body and soul in the keen air of the mountain-height, and comfort in the near breathing of his friend. A healthy reaction from his worries set in.

"Hang it all, I've done the best I could!" he said to himself. "Let them come up and pitch me out, and find out who did it if they can!"

Whereupon he rolled over and went to sleep likewise.

The first night on the ground after sleeping in a bed is bound to be more or less troubled. By and by Kenaston awoke and, finding sleep banished from his eyelids, sat up to enjoy night on the mountain for a while. He filled his pipe, and lighted it from an ember of the dying fire. Curly slept still, but restlessly, tossing in his blanket and muttering.

Kenaston smiled at the muttering, and his eyes softened on the other. His friend! A young man's breast lifts up at the word. No woman had a place in Kenaston's heart, and it was all for his friend.

Curly's words earlier had reassured the trooper. He went on to dream of the time when this wretched business should be ended, the crime discovered, Stronghead or whoever it was punished, Curly and Stella happily married, and he, Ken, the friend of them both.

Suddenly Curly said in his sleep with perfect distinctness:

"He's dead."

ALL the blood rushed to Kenaston's heart, and he forgot his dream and his pipe. A painful struggle was precipitated in his breast. He had heard that if a sleeping man be questioned according to the trend of his dream, very often he will answer truly. But he could not cause his friend thus to betray his secret while he slept. That was unthinkable; he would not ask the question. Howsoever, it may be that the great desire in his heart to know communicated itself to the sleeping man. At any rate the question was answered without being asked.

"Baldy Red," Curly went on in the hurrying toneless voice of the sleeper. "Shot through the heart, and a good job, too."

An agony of indecision scattered all Kenaston's faculties. Duty dragged him one way, loyalty to his friend the other. The two things were of nearly equal force within him, and the struggle was frightful. A cold sweat broke out over him. He tried to rise, but he was chained down. Meanwhile the great desire to know still exerted itself, and again the question was answered without being asked.

"Put him in the middle of camp, and the trooper will never find him. Bury him in the mud-hole in front of Jim Kettle's place."

With all his heart Kenaston wished the words unspoken. But there they were, and must be acted on. The great question still remained unanswered: Who did it? Kenaston would not allow himself to think it. In a sudden panic lest his unconscious friend should tell him any more, he leaned over, and shook him.

"Wake up!" he said sharply.

"What's the matter?" murmured Curly sleepily in his own voice.

"Roll over," said Kenaston. "You're snoring fit to wake the dead."

"Oh, sorry!" said Curly, choosing a new position, and immediately falling asleep again. There was no more sleep for his partner.

When it grew light Curly automatically awoke, and set about making a fire and breakfast. Kenaston confessed that he had

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not slept, and Curly ascribed it to the hardness of their bed. His mind was now running on the hunt, and he was not very observant of such things anyway, so that Kenaston's haggard look and evasive eyes suggested nothing further to him than sleeplessness.

They set out in search of their prey. Kenaston went on with it like a dream. The chase was not eventful, and at breakfast-time they returned to camp empty-handed. Curly suggested they try again next night. Kenaston agreed, but stipulated that they sleep in their beds, and start at daylight. He did not expect to go himself.

Returning to camp, they passed the fateful mud-hole in front of Jim Kettle's in company. This hole had some time since been given up as a bad job, and the wagons now passed around it. There was water in it when all the rest of the road was dry. No longer disturbed by wheels, the water was clear on top, with muddy clouds hanging suspended beneath. The morning sun was reflected in a cheerful glare from the surface.

As they approached, Kenaston became afflicted with horrid self-consciousness. His heart began to beat as if he expected what was hidden there to rise from the surface as they passed. He wondered that Curly did not read his knowledge of the secret in his face. But Curly's mind was untroubled. He was whistling blithely, as they circled the pool, and he kicked a clod of earth into it.

"That place ought to be filled up," he remarked offhand.

It was a long, long day to Kenaston. He schooled himself to sleep as long as he could. Afterward, in order to divert suspicion, he made believe to resume his search around camp. But his thoughts never strayed from the mud-hole, and what he expected to find there that night. During the afternoon the sky clouded over, promising complete darkness later, which suited his purpose.

The idea of putting the corpse in such a place savored of Stronghead's ironic humor, and Kenaston never doubted his man. His police instinct was now thoroughly aroused. While he still felt compunctions as to the manner in which he had acquired the secret from his friend, he had none toward Stronghead. And he was beginning to taste the sweets of success in prospect.

Self-confidence returned. To-day, when he met Stronghead, and the old man chaffed him, he could give as good as he took.

"I've got you!" he said to himself.

In thus dwelling on the satisfaction of getting the best of Stronghead, he forgot Stella Gurney's unexplained interest in the affair. He had not seen Stella since the morning after the shooting.

IT WAS one o'clock before perfect quiet descended on the camp and Kenaston could venture forth with his spade. He wore rubber boots to his hips. It was as dark as he had hoped. In a way the darkness hampered his work, but it concealed him, which was more important. Now, unless some one stumbled on him, there was little danger of his being interrupted, for on one side of the pool was the store, with Jim Kettle sleeping at a safe distance in a room behind, and on the other side the Japanese, even though they might hear or see him, were never the ones to give the alarm. Arakawa and his partner Shegaihedai had an infinite capacity for minding their own business.

There was about two feet of water in the center of the hole. Cautiously wading in, Kenaston thrust his spade into the soft mud of the bottom. He had two hours of complete darkness before him, and he took his time, lifting each spadeful from the water with infinite care not to make a splash, and letting it slide off on the hard ground beside the hole.

It was a rare dark night for the latitude. The shadows of the shacks with the suggestions of leaning tree-trunks behind made a picture painted with lampblack on an indigo ground. It was so still that a hint of the snoring in the surrounding houses reached Kenaston's ears. Occasionally an owl hooted down the valley.

He had lifted perhaps a double score of spadefuls when, upon thrusting the implement down again, the iron point pressed something softly resistant. A strong shudder passed through the trooper's frame, and all the ghoulish, churchyard tales he had ever heard rushed back on him. He could have vowed he smelled corruption in the air. It was not an agreeable job to be engaged on alone in the dead of night. Tiny beads of sweat broke out on his forehead, and he paused to wipe his face, and to steel his nerves.

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This was hardly more than the beginning of his work. Feeling his way with the spade as best he could, he loosened the earth all around the object that resisted it. When he had removed all that he could explore with the spade-point, he bent over and, thrusting down his arms, dug with his hands. Seizing the wrappings of the bundle that lay there, he tugged at it with all his strength. Little by little he loosened it. Finally it yielded out of its clutching bed, and out on the dry ground he drew a heavy object of significant shape, wrapped in many thicknesses of canvas encased in dripping mud. By this time there was a tinge of green in the indigo background.

Kenaston made no attempt to shovel back the earth he had removed. His discovery was bound to come to light in the morning anyway. He wondered, in passing, how they had been able to put the body away without leaving any sign. He dragged his bundle up the road, no longer especially careful to make no sound. However, the camp was sunk in slumber, and no one heard him.

Reaching his own door at last, he lit a lantern and, cutting the ropes around the bundle—a piece of the very rope that had bound his arms on the same night—unrolled the many wrappings, and looked on what was contained within.

In a wilder state of civilization, such sights are taken more as a matter of course. Death is always just behind a tree, and they are on grim, familiar, joking terms with him. Kenaston was young, but it was not the first time he had looked on death by violence. He held up his lantern and gazed down with the same old, and ever new, start of amazement and awe. What was it that had changed the sanguine, boisterous, egotistical man he had supped with to this insensate lump dragged about by one and another, and thrust into a hole?

WHILE he continued to look, his mind ran busily ahead. It would be no easy matter to arrest Stronghead and carry him out in the face of the whole camp. Stronghead had given his word not to run away. Perhaps it might be better not to say anything, to take no action until he got help. In that case, he reflected, should he not try to conceal the evidences of his work in the mud-hole, and hide the body in the stable until he was ready to act?

Kenaston never doubted that Stronghead had fired the shot. The wound in the body was horridly obvious. As he looked at it, Kenaston slowly frowned, and his heart began to contract with apprehension. It was too big. Stronghead's revolver, as everybody knew, was a modern, hammerless .32. This gaping hole had never been made by a .32. Kenaston hurriedly turned the body over. In doing so, he felt the bullet behind the back under the coat, and presently it rolled out on the ground. It was of .44 caliber. There was only one gun in camp of that size, and it belonged to Curly Briscoe.

He let the body fall back, and stood gazing at it stupidly, while the fact burned itself in. His friend! He hated his job then. The brave career he had planned for himself turned to dust and ashes. Anything but a policeman to hunt down one's friends! For the moment he was ready to burn the red coat, and cast in his lot with the lawbreakers.

But a spark of hope sprang into life. The conviction that Stronghead had done the thing still stuck in his mind. The fact that Baldy had been shot with Curly's revolver did not necessarily prove that Curly had aimed it. Stronghead might not have had his weapon handy, while Curly, it was known, always carried his. What more natural than for Curly to lend it to the older man?

But Kenaston looked again, and his hopes were quenched. For he saw that two hats had been wrapped up with the body; the first, Baldy's own battered black derby, the other, a dashing, stiff-brimmed Stetson, with a tooled leather band. It was Curly's; his name was written inside. A double bullet-hole through the crown explained the necessity of putting it away, and accounted for one of the shots Kenaston had heard. He could no longer doubt what had happened. Baldy's revolver had been buried with him also. Two of the chambers were empty.

It was now beginning to grow light, and Kenaston blew out his lantern. He could not bear to leave the grim relic exposed to the merciless day, and he dragged it out of its coverings, inside the shack. The soaking, muddy canvas he gathered up and thrust within his stable. Returning to the house, he changed his clothes and removed the traces of his night's work from his person.

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This done, he stood gazing at the clay with hanging arms, at a loss what to do next, when suddenly a shrill, sweet, whistled call broke on his ears. It was the meadow-lark's song, the private signal agreed upon between him and Curly. He had forgotten that Curly was coming to breakfast with him. A groan broke from him, and he instinctively thrust the body under his bed.

CHAPTER V

BRAVADO

CURLY breezed in, as cool and smiling as the morning itself. He carried a pail.

"Overslept myself," he announced cheerfully. "We ought to have been ready to start by now."

Kenaston, making believe to busy himself with the stove, stole a surprised glance at his friend. This was anything but the picture of a man with a killing on his conscience. He wondered how Curly had avoided seeing the disturbance at the mud-hole on his way. Perhaps this air of his was mere bravado. But his look was as open as the sky.

"Haven't you started the fire yet!" Curly went on, putting the pail down. "You're as bad as me. I brought water."

This explained how he had missed seeing the mud-hole. He had come by way of the camp's common well, which was behind Jim Kettle's place. Kenaston wished that Curly had taken warning. How was he to tell him out and out? How was he to arrest a man that had come to eat with him?

He was reminded by a tinkling sound in his pocket that he had a pair of handcuffs ready. His hand shook as he lighted the fire. Impartially observing them both, an onlooker would unhesitatingly have picked Kenaston as the man with guilt on his soul.

"You're looking seedy," said Curly. "No sleep yet?"

Kenaston shook his head.

"Can't understand it," said Curly. "I'd sleep if it was my last night on earth. You're hipped on this Baldy business. Put it out of your mind for a while.

"That's easy to say," muttered Kenaston.

Curly came further into the shack. "The floor's all wet," he said unsuspiciously.

"From—from my bath," stammered Kenaston.

Curly commented facetiously on his friend's high-flown notions of cleanliness and produced pipe and tobacco.

"If breakfast isn't ready I've got to stay my stomach with a smoke. Rotten bad habit, eh?"

He plumped himself down on the edge of the bed. Kenaston shuddered. From across the room he could see what was under it.

Curly sniffed delicately.

"I must say for a clean man you keep a funny smell around your place," he said teasingly. "Something stale. You need to fumigate, old man."

Kenaston dropped a stick of wood with a clatter. Never until now had he suspected the existence of nerves in himself. He made no attempt to reply.

Curly rattled on unheedingly. "It's going to be a bully fine day! The air up there is like champagne. We'll have a great time. Forget your troubles, old man. Loosen up! Let's be jolly while we——"

He stopped. Kenaston, looking at him swiftly, saw that he was staring down at the floor between his feet. A trickle of water was slowly creeping from under the bed, with little twists and pauses on the floor like a sluggish worm. Kenaston held his breath.

"Where's that from?" said Curly curiously.

"Look and see," said Kenaston hoarsely.

Curly looked at his friend, surprised at his tone. Then, ducking his head, he glanced under the bed. He sprang up, drawing a sharp breath between his teeth. For an instant his eyes bolted wildly, his head went back. He couldn't get breath enough. But he forced down the clamps of his self-control, and presently his eyes met Kenaston's firmly. They looked at each other in pale, grim silence. There was no sound in the shack but the murmur of the newly lit fire in the stovepipe.

AT LAST Curly said quietly enough, "So you found him. Smart work. Why didn't you tell me when I first came in?"

Kenaston avoided his eye. "I—I tried to," he said. "You made it hard for me."

A harsh note of laughter broke from Curly.

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"You've got a great way of breaking the news," he said.

"Maybe you think this is easy for me," Kenaston burst out.

"Easy? What do you mean?"

"Well, I found the bullet and your hat. I know you did it."

Curly threw up his head.

"Very well, I did do it," he said defiantly. "And I'd do it again."

Kenaston stared. "You take it pretty easy," he said.

"You don't know what led up to it," Curly said. His voice rang oddly. "Somebody had to do it; and why not me? Though they string me up in the jail courtyard, and burn my body in lime, I'll never be sorry for it!"

"Tell me about it?" said Kenaston.

Curly shook his head.

"Not as an officer," Kenaston said stiffly.

"It's not my secret," said Curly.

There was a silence. They watched each other askance. It was now fully light out-of-doors, and through the side window of the shack they could see the pink flush of sunrise creeping down the snowy flank of Mount Ellerslie. Around camp the sleepy chickadees were beginning to bestir themselves.

"Well what are you going to do about it?" asked Curly at last.

"I've got to arrest you," Kenaston said.

Curly nodded.

"Will you give me your parole?" asked the trooper.

Curly promptly shook his head. "Liberty is sweet," he said with a smile.

Kenaston made a step toward him. "Then I've got to——"

Curly broke for the door. Kenaston was too far away to intercept him, but with lightning swiftness he caught up a chair, and slung it across the floor ahead of Curly. It was timed to a nicety. Curly sprawled helplessly over it. Before he could recover himself, Kenaston was upon him, and the handcuffs clicked.

They picked themselves up, avoiding each other's eyes. In the conflict of his emotions Kenaston scowled and pursed up his lips to whistle, like a guilty schoolboy trying to look unconscious.

"I'm sorry," he growled. "Maybe it wasn't quite square, the chair. But the odds are against me. I can't take any chances."

"Square enough all right," Curly said, as uncomfortable as the other. "I'm not blaming you."

Kenaston closed the door, and stared unhappily out of the front window. Curly with his manacled hands picked up his pipe, and thrust it between his teeth again. He turned the chair over, and straddled it with his elbows on the back. Seeing Kenaston's dejected back he scowled fiercely.

"Oh, buck up, Ken!" he said in a voice made harsh to conceal the real feeling in it. "Gad! I don't blame you a little bit! It's just the rotten circumstances we're in. You're a policeman and I'm a killer, and you couldn't do any differently. What does it matter? You're a good head, and I'm a good head and we think a heap of each other. Nothing can change that!"

Kenaston made no answer, but his relief and gratitude showed in a sidelong gleam of his eye toward his friend. He turned to the stove, and made a great clatter among the covers and the pots to hide his confusion.

"We've got to eat, anyway," he said gruffly.

Curly whipped up his cheerful spirits.

"Yea, bo! Though we hang as high as Danny Deever in the morning!" he cried. "My pipe went out in the fracas. Strike a match for me, old boy. I'll make you wait on me hand and foot now!"

Kenaston's spirits leaped gratefully to join him in his foolery.

"My foot will wait on you promptly, anyway," he retorted.

He held the lighted match over the bowl of Curly's pipe, and their eyes beamed kindly on each other again. It was a great relief to their feelings to slang each other.

"Hey! Get a move on with the breakfast!" cried Curly. "You're as slow as Stronghead's old bell-mare at the head of the pack-train!"

"What do you expect?" retorted Kenaston. "A man can't be undertaker, policeman and cook all at once!"

"Undertaker?" Curly flung back. "You grave-robber, you!"

They laughed like boys.

Curly's bravado knew no limits.

"I say," he went on with a nod over his shoulder. "Suppose we ask our friend to wait outside. Two's company; three's a crowd. Breakfast won't do him any good. He's lost his taste for bacon."

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"Watch the bacon, then," said Kenaston. "I've lugged him up and down already until my back aches!"

And so, while Curly stirred the bacon with his bound hands, the intruder was assisted out of the shack. Curly never ceased his humorous commentary, but it was observable that he kept his back turned from the time that It appeared from under the bed until It disappeared through the door. Kenaston removed It to the stable, and laid It upon fresh straw.

BREAKFAST consisted of porridge, bacon, tea and bread. When it was put on the table they looked at each other in embarrassment. Curly suddenly thrust out his hands.

"Parole for half an hour," he said humorously. "I've no notion of being fed like a suffragette."

Kenaston unlocked the handcuffs, and laid them on the table between them. They continued to joke largely, to hide the fact that neither had any appetite.

"Rotten food," said Curly.

"What do you expect? Peacocks' tongues?" retorted Kenaston. "You're the guest of the Government now. Nobody kicks at f ee grub."

"Government be blowed!" said Curly. "When we get down to Carlingford I'll have my meals sent into the jail from Crazy Ike's. Best restaurant on the line! Gad! think of eating fried eggs again! Do you remember what an egg tastes like, Ken? I'll eat a dozen a day while you're choking on Government rations."

"Don't you worry," said Kenaston. "I'll be your guard, and I'll have to eat h lf of everything that's sent in to make sure they are not slipping you a rat-tail file."

When Curly was finished eating he coolly picked up the handcuffs, and snapped them on his wrists again.

"What's the order of the day, Cap?" he asked with a show of unconcern.

"We've got to be on the road in ten minutes," said Kenaston.

"Afraid of an attempted rescue, eh?" said Curly slyly. "You could hardly expect me to help you fight them off, could you?"

"I shouldn't expect it," said Kenaston good-humoredly.

"You know I've only to raise my voice ——" suggested Curly with a shrewd look.

"I know it," said Kenaston grimly.

Getting up, he strapped on his belt with service-revolver and shells.

"For me?" asked Curly with a twinkle.

Kenaston shook his head. "For anybody who lays a hand on you."

"Well I'm not going to bawl for help like a slapped brat," said Curly.

Kenaston busied himself making ready for their ride.

"What are you going to do with——?"

Curly nodded in the direction of the stable.

"Leave him," said Kenaston. "I'll send back Stukeley from Mile Fifty-Three to put him away. Look here," he went on, "there's one thing I'd like to know. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

"What's that?" asked Curly.

"How did you put him away without leaving any marks?"

"We drove a wagon up beside the hole and threw all the dirt in it. Then we shoveled it back without its touching the ground."

"No wonder!" said Kenaston.

He sat down to strap on his spurs, and Curly, rising, went to the front window and looked out. For many seconds he stood there without moving. Finally the trooper stood up.

"All ready," he said.

Curly turned swiftly. There was a great change in his face. The light of reckless bravado had failed, and the heavy, anxious lines that Kenaston had seen before were drawn around his eyes and mouth.

"Ken," he stammered, "God knows I hate to ask it, but how can I go without——"

"Without what?" asked Kenaston, surprised.

"Ken, I've got to see Stella before I go," he blurted out.

Here was emotion forcing another crisis on them. Kenaston came to a dead stop. His face fell absurdly. He scowled.

"How can I, Curly?" he said with an aggrieved air. "It isn't right. You shouldn't ask it. Think of the fuss she'd make! It would queer the whole thing! What good would it do?"

"She's all alone over there," Curly went on, muttering hurriedly and shamefacedly, still looking out of the window. "How can I leave her without a word? Nothing is understood between us. How can I go without knowing where I stand? There's

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her to think of, too. She'd imagine the worst, finding me gone with you. I want to cheer her up a little. You don't know what she's been through!"

"Don't I!" thought Kenaston.

"Be fair to me, Ken," Curly hurried on. "You know if I resisted arrest it would bring the whole camp about your ears. They'd never let you take me. But I'm going quietly. You owe me this much. Don't make me beg it of you!"

"It's just the same. You might as well go direct to Stronghead," objected Kenaston. "She'll never let me take you. And I can't fight her."

"You don't know her!" said Curly quickly. "She's clear grit. She'll do what I tell her. I'll explain to her. I'll make her promise not to raise an alarm till we've been gone two hours."

Kenaston scowled the harder as he weakened. "How can I let you go over there?" he growled.

"You go," said Curly eagerly. "I swear I'll not stir from here, or make a sound while you're gone. Bring her back with you. Five minutes is all I ask. You can hear everything I say."

"I don't want to hear it," said Kenaston in hasty alarm.

He hung in a wretched state of indecision.

"Ken," said Curly, "if it was you——"

"Oh, I'll bring her," he blurted out, and darted out of the door, fearing a demonstration of gratitude.

CROSSING the clearing, he knocked on Stella's door. A startled voice presently answered him.

"Who is it?"

"Kenaston."

"What do you want?"

"Briscoe is at my shack, and we want to speak to you for a moment. Will you come over?"

"Is anything wrong?"

Kenaston was nonplused how to answer. He fidgeted and frowned on the doorstep. The frightened voice repeated the question in a higher key.

"Please come right over," he said gruffly.

When he came back Curly was still at the window. "Hold out your hands," commanded Kenaston.

Curly obeyed, and Kenaston unlocked the handcuffs once more, and slipped them in his pocket. They avoided each other's eyes.

"Thanks, old man," said Curly.

"You can't talk to a girl with your hands tied," mumbled Kenaston.

Almost immediately Stella came running like a doe across the open space. The rich hair that had ensnared Kenaston's fancy, and many another man's besides, was flying behind her in two soft braids. Stella had the grace of Nature, which is best set off by plain print dresses. The one she had on was blue, lighter than her eyes. Stella's eyes were of a blue that arrested the attention a good way off, like a phenomenon.

A serene prettiness is potent enough in its way, but the sight of beauty in distress is like a two-edged sword to mow men down. Stella's wide, pained eyes and haggard cheeks caused Kenaston a shock of compassion that was like a physical hurt in his breast. She swept past him where he stood in the doorway, straight to Curly, like an arrow. Kenaston quickly closed the door on her, and went around the house to saddle the horses, and drive the sight of her from his mind.

When his beasts were ready he led them out, and tethered them at the upper sdie of the house, out of the range of sight of anybody who might happen to look up the street so early. He went back to the door. The five minutes were up, but he could not bear to break in on them. He hung there unhappily, until presently Curly himself opened the door. His face was grim and drawn.

"You were right," he muttered to Kenaston. "She shouldn't have come. It only hurts."

STELLA was standing inside, leaning against the wall with her back to the door, her face hidden in her arm—the simple attitude of utter abandonment to grief.

Kenaston scowled unhappily at the sight.

"All ready," he whispered to Curly. "Come on."

She heard and wildly flung about.

"No! No! Not yet!" she cried. "Wait a minute!"

"Stella!" Curly said harshly. "I promised him. And you promised me!"

"It's more than I can bear," she cried wildly. "Kenaston, wait a minute. I want to tell you something. Don't you know

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there are times when the law is in the wrong? Look at me! You know me a little; do you think me a bad woman? And him, you know him, could he do anything low or mean or cowardly? What does the law want with him then? He did it for me! What does the law want with dragging my wretched story into the light?"

Kenaston felt that he trembled on the verge of complete discovery, and he shrank from it. The sight of her agony seemed to drag the heart out of his breast, and the very pain of it turned him hard and stubborn.

"Stella!" cried Curly again.

"I will tell him! I will tell him!" she cried.

"I forbid you!" he commanded. "What good is all this? The man has got to do his duty. He'll take me anyway. I promised to go."

She collapsed in a chair. "Then go, go quickly," she said in a muffled voice.

The two men went out, closing the door behind them. Around the corner of the house they untied the two horses and, swinging themselves into the saddles, took to the road without speaking. There was nothing to say. Curly rode with his eyes fixed on space like a blind man.

Just before the forest swallowed them Kenaston cast a final glance over his shoulder down the road through the camp. As he looked, a figure appeared on the last doorstep down the row, and stood stretching in the early sunshine. It was Stronghead. Kenaston schooled his nerves to betray no movement. He glanced swiftly at Curly. Curly did not look behind him.

Kenaston looked down the row again. Stronghead had discovered them, and the stretch was arrested midway. He darted around the house. At that moment the two riders were swallowed in the wood. If they had got away but one minute earlier, Kenaston thought!

Curly had seen nothing. They trotted briskly over the soft earth. At the bridge Curly pulled his horse into a walk to avoid making too much noise. At the other side he drew up and held out his hands to Kenaston.

"Put 'em on," he said brusquely. "Parole's ended."

Kenaston nodded, and did so. He broke a switch. "We've got to ride," he muttered as brusque as the other. He gave Curly's horse a sharp cut, and the two animals broke into a gallop.

CHAPTER VI

A GALLOP ON THE TOTE-ROAD

KENASTON did not doubt they would be followed, but he considered his horses as good as any in camp and, barring accidents, he was hopeful of showing clean heels to the crowd. Moreover, he still had the hope of meeting Stukeley or others of his comrades on the way in to his help.

For thirty miles east of Mile Ninety-Two, the road was execrable, and any speed was out of the question for either Kenaston or his pursuers. Enough curses had been called down on the head of the engineer of the tote-road to damn him to the deepest pit, if they had been hearkened to. Perhaps he had done the best he could, but the freighters were unable to understand why, when the valley appeared to extend through on a level, they were obliged to climb over one steep spur of the mountains after another. On the hills the way was broken with rocks and holes; in the hollows it was not a road, but a morass.

At the top of one of the long ascents, Kenaston pulled up to breathe the horses, and to look behind him. From this point he could overlook a certain stretch of the road in the bottom of the valley, nearly a mile behind. As he watched the place he saw a tiny black spot move across, followed by another and another, four in all. They were horses, and ridden at a gallop. Stronghead had not wasted any time.

Kenaston glanced at his prisoner. Curly had seen the pursuers also but he made no comment. The trooper slipped out of his saddle and, unfastening his halter-rope, tied Curly's ankles together loosely under the horse.

"Sorry," he said uncomfortably. "But I can't take any chances."

"Oh, rats, don't apologize!" growled Curly.

That was about all the speech they exchanged *en route.*

Owing to the washout of the bridge down the line there was no freighting on the road, but they occasionally met pedestrians singly and in pairs, with their packs on their backs, either laborers looking for work on the grade or gold-hunters with their field-glasses, their

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geological hammers and their ever-searching eyes. The tote-road had this season unlocked the pass for prospecting. All the wayfarers stared curiously at the sweat-covered horses, and the two grim young men who bestrode them. The handcuffs were not much in evidence while Curly held his rein, but the relationship between red-coat and the other was clear. The riders paused to speak to none.

This valley leading down from Ellerslie Pass was like a narrow corridor in the earth, guarded by ranks upon ranks of soldierly peaks, those behind looking over the shoulders of the front rank, and glimpses of others still farther and farther behind.

When it rained in the valley all the peaks drew mantles of white about their shoulders, and in the gullies above the old snow hardened into ice, and each gully fed the thread of a stream. The same river which flowed below Ninety-Two still accompanied them, gathering up its threads and its skeins from the mountains, and waxing greater all the way. By turns it meandered back and forth through a bit of a green meadow, or plunged hoarse-voiced through a gorge where the valley narrowed.

Generally speaking the road was laid out high above the proposed line of the railway. Down below they had glimpses of the raw grade, and the rock-cuttings. Most of the camps were at some distance off the road.

Kenaston had hoped to bring his prisoner into the post at Mile Fifty-Three before he stopped. Here he could at least divide his responsibility. He was sorely in need of sleep. It was merciless to his horses to run them hour upon hour, but with Stronghead's party somewhere close behind, he felt impelled to urge them until they dropped. While he was still fifteen miles away they began to fail rapidly, and he was obliged to consider what to do. If Stronghead's party was still following close, their horses must be played out too. But it was possible they might have secured fresh mounts from one of the camps. Kenaston was under the disadvantage that, while Stronghead was able to get frequent reports of his progress from the pedestrians, he had no way of finding out what Stronghead was doing. Kenaston finally decided to take the time to change horses at Agnew's stopping-house, Mile Sixty-Five. Agnew was known to have plenty of horses, some good ones.

Up to this time they had met no one they knew. About two miles from Agnew's they glimpsed two familiar figures from afar, which caused Kenaston to frown, and draw closer to his prisoner. It was Husky Decker and Jim Bent of Mile Ninety-Two, who had been sent down to the plains a day or two before the accident of Baldy to buy cattle to relieve the meat-famine. A breed-boy was driving half a dozen lean steers along the road, while the two white men followed, lounging comfortably in their saddles.

IN ORDER to avoid stampeding the cattle, Kenaston was obliged to slow down to a walk, and pull off to one side. He took the bridle of Curly's horse, and led him past. Husky and the other, taking in the significance of this maneuver, pulled up, showing faces of unbounded astonishment. Evidently no news had come down the line. They waited, expecting an explanation. Kenaston saw of course that he had nothing to hope for from them. He observed with a secret anxiety that their two horses were fresh, and fretting at the bit. It was a point against him.

"Hello! What's up?" cried Husky.

Kenaston, nodding curtly, urged his weary horses into a canter again.

"Police business," he said stiffly. "Sorry, can't stop."

Curly, passing his friends, winked at them, and waved his manacled hands.

Topping a slight rise some hundreds of yards beyond, Kenaston looked back. Husky and Jim were still sitting on their motionless horses, looking in his direction as if stupefied with astonishment. The hill cut them off. A mile farther, hearing hoofs behind him, Kenaston looked again, and saw the two riding hard on his trail. Seeing him look around they pulled up and followed, keeping the same distance, to Agnew's. When Kenaston rode into the stable-yard they drew up at the gate and waited there, making no attempt to interfere, but attentively watching all that went on.

It was a typical freighters' stopping-house, built at the edge of an unexpected meadow in the bottom of the valley. The yard was fenced with stout pine-poles, three bars high. As they rode in the gate a little log shack faced them, thatched with

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sprouting sods, and with door and window comically askew. On their left was the stable, crouching low on the ground for warmth, and the corral with its higher fence between stable and dwelling. On the other side only the three-bar fence separated the yard from the little "prairie."

In answer to Kenaston's peremptory hail, old Agnew appeared in his doorway.

Just how old he was, no one knew. He was gone in the knees and his back was bowed. They called him "Link" Agnew, it may be because his eyesight was still keen, or because like the lynx he was all of a color; clothes, skin and hair, an ashy brown that rendered him almost invisible against his customary background.

"I want two horses," Kenaston said. "Police business."

The old man took time to weigh the situation before he answered, and his cunning eyes showed a gleam that bespoke anything but friendliness to redcoats.

"Horses?" he drawled, without moving.

Kenaston was already on the ground, busy with his girths.

"Horses, I said!" he repeated with a commanding glance. "And look sharp!"

The old man hobbled across the yard with a burlesque assumption of decrepitude; groaning loudly, one hand on the small of his back. The men at the gate snickered. Kenaston's face burned, but he held himself in. A young man is at a disadvantage with a septuagenarian. Old Link knew he was safe. Meanwhile Kenaston's anxious ears already imagined more hoofs pounding the trail.

He gritted his teeth, and worked with dogged swiftness. After throwing off his own saddle and bridle, he untied Curly's feet and motioned him to dismount and stand by the fence. Removing the other saddle and bridle, he led the wearied horses into the corral and turned them loose. Curly, meanwhile, coolly produced smoking-materials and, aided by the top bar of the fence, filled his pipe and lighted it with a deftness that suggested he might have been handcuffed all his life.

Link Agnew presently issued from the stable leading a pair of horses, with loud oaths and comic byplay. It was an aged team that had been worn out on the grade, raw-boned, spavined, and dejected of mien.

"Whoa there, Silver-Heels! Whoa, Starlight!" he roared, jerking their halters in an assumed passion, while the old horses pricked up their ears and stared at him in mild astonishment. "Darn you, be quiet! Hanged if I give you any oats for a week!"

The men at the gate roared. Curly laughed too, with a deprecating side-glance at Kenaston. It was not at all funny to the trooper. He set his jaw and, avoiding the circus in the middle of the yard, strode forthwith into the stable to look about for himself. The good horses were well known up and down the road. He saw a gray that he recognized, and a speedy sorrel gelding and, untying them, led them out.

Tying them to the fence he saddled the gray for Curly. Link now appeared to think better of his antics and, letting his old horses stray, came over and started to saddle the sorrel. When the gray was ready, at a word from Kenaston, Curly swung himself into the saddle, and Kenaston tied his ankles as before. Kenaston felt a sense of gratitude toward his friend and prisoner. Curly at least did nothing to make his job any harder, and he might easily have done so. All this time Kenaston's ears were stretched for the sound of more hoofs on the road.

Link got the sorrel ready, and strolled away toward the house with an innocent air. Kenaston did not see the wink he tipped the two men at the gate. But the minute he touched the saddle he realized how he had been fooled again. The sorrel sprang all four feet in the air, and plunged, bucking and squealing with rage, all around the yard. Husky and Jim could not contain their mirth at the sight. Link watched from his door with well-feigned astonishment. The two old horses trotted out of harm's way into the stable.

A bucking horse had no terrors for the policeman, and he kept his seat easily. But the precious moments were flying, and Kenaston enjoyed being laughed at no more than any other young man. A wholesome rage purpled his cheeks, and made his blue eyes snap. The horse was not a bad one, and he guessed what was the matter. Several minutes passed before he was able to dismount. As soon as he left the saddle the horse quieted. But it was too late; he now heard plainly what he had been fearing: the sound of many more hoofs up the road.

Lifting his saddle he saw, as he expected, that Link had left a crease in the saddle-blanket across the horse's backbone. Hastily smoothing it and girthing up again, he

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mounted. At that instant Stronghead, Jim Kettle, Wingy Degnon and Slim Pete Waters rode around a bend in the road.

SEEING Kenaston and Curly a view-halloo broke from them; and loud greetings were exchanged with Husky and Jim Bent. The newcomers drew up at the gate. Kenaston saw that their horses were as weary as his own had been. Possessing himself of Curly's bridle-rein, he watched them grimly. Six to one was heavy odds, and there was old Link besides, who would not scruple to cut him down from behind if the chance offered.

There was a low-voiced consultation at the gate, Stronghead apparently explaining to Husky and Jim Bent what had happened at Mile Ninety-Two and instructing them as to the part they were now to play. At the end of it these two turned their horses' heads and trotted on down the road, cutting off Kenaston's way to Mile Fifty-Three.

Leaving the three others in the gateway, Stronghead then rode into the yard. He came toward Kenaston.

"Hello, boys," he cried with sardonic geniality. "You rode away this morning without telling us good-by."

Kenaston drew his revolver.

"Keep your distance," he said harshly. "I will shoot any man that interferes with my prisoner."

Stronghead laughed loudly, echoed of course from the gate.

"Bless his rosy cheeks!" he cried. "A reg'lar little firecracker ain't he! I bet you're a reader of Old Sleuth's Library, sonny."

Kenaston kept his face.

"Order your men to stand away from the gate," he commanded.

"Stand away from the gate, men," roared Stronghead, leering at them.

They did not move of course. Stronghead looked back at Kenaston with an innocent, ironic shrug.

"I can't handle them," he said.

Link Agnew had ventured out of his shack again.

"I want horses," Stronghead said to him.

The two of them disappeared inside the stable. Kenaston looked about him sharply. There was but the one gate to the yard. He could not risk rushing it, for in a mix-up the trembling sorrel was the least dependable of all the horses, and if he bolted with him he would surely lose his prisoner. He had a sense of being trapped there. He backed his horse and Curly's against the fence, and grimly watched his chance. He had no doubt that Stronghead was preparing some ingenious surprise for him. It was hard to feel their lines tightening about him, and be obliged to wait for them to act.

Meanwhile the men at the gate had pleasantries for Curly.

"Hey there, Curly, goin' to 'list in the police?"

"'List nothing!" retorted Curly. "If they offer me a commission I'll think it over."

"I'm goin' to join the Salvation Army," said Wingy. "Bet I'll be a major ahead o' you."

"Drum-major, maybe."

"Ask Rosy-Cheeks what he uses for the complexion," drawled Slim Pete.

"Ask him yourself."

And so on.

Link Agnew came out of the stable leading a strong buckskin that Kenaston knew. He was not as fast a horse as the sorrel, but he had good sense and endurance. The trooper blamed himself for not having chosen that one. Old Link was spry enough now. He changed Stronghead's saddle and bridle to the fresh horse, and went back for another.

The buckskin was known as a jumper. A light broke upon Kenaston. He saw his opportunity, and he hesitated not a second. Suddenly urging his two horses forward he rode ahead of Curly, and sprang from the sorrel to the buckskin without touching earth, an old police trick. The sorrel went cantering around the yard.

Seizing Curly's bridle again, and wheeling both horses, he put them squarely to the fence, urging them with voice and spur. It was a long chance to take, but it won. They took the jump cleanly. He let go Curly's rein as they rose. The animals recovered well and bounded like jack-rabbits across the meadow to the road.

It was all accomplished in a few seconds. The three, seeing Kenaston's intention, shouted and urged their horses into the yard. But they crowded each other in the gate and, by the time they got in, Kenaston and Curly were out.

Turning, they dashed out again, and down the road to intercept them, but their horses were spent. Seeing the uselessness of

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such a chase, they pulled up and came back for fresh horses. Kenaston and his prisoner gained the road and, galloping up a little rise, passed out of sight.

TEN minutes later, riding hard, once more they heard hoofs behind them, and Kenaston turning saw the sorrel coming like the wind bearing Stronghead. There was nothing on the road could equal this horse for speed. Kenaston pulled his horses aside, and Stronghead flashed by, sawing at the bit.

With three before him and three behind him in the road, Kenaston was not much better off than before, but at least he was out of his trap and in motion. Things can not look so black when the blood is racing. It was a nerve-racking ride for the young trooper. He knew that those ahead would never allow him to bring his prisoner into Mile Fifty-Three without an attempt at rescue, and he did not know behind what bend in the road or clump of willows or jutting point of rock they lay in wait.

Thrusting his left arm through Curly's bridle-rein, he guided his own horse with his left hand. In his right he carried his revolver free and, putting down his head, rode hard.

They came upon a man walking in the road who drew aside, startled at the sight of the gun. Pulling up, Kenaston eagerly questioned him. He said that three men had passed him but a minute or two before, riding at a gallop. So they had joined forces. Kenaston wondered a little why they should still be riding hard, as if they were the fugitives, and he in pursuit.

He went on at a more moderate pace. A few minutes later they met a small party of laborers walking in. These men swore that no other riders had passed them within an hour. Kenaston, hearing this, set his jaw. It was evident the ambuscade was prepared.

There was nothing for him to do but to ride straight into it and take his chance. To wait would simply be to allow them to close up on him from behind. Nor could he leave the road, for the mountainside was impassible for horses. He spurred on recklessly, holding his revolver ready.

They rode through a stretch of poplar-bush with thick undergrowth, and issued out in another meadow, flat and narrow between the bases of the mountains on either side. Kenaston was surprised that they were allowed to reach it unmolested. There was no sign of their adversaries in the long open space. At the other end stood another stopping-house, Pete Leduc's. Hope sprang up in Kenaston's breast. Since the odds were so great against him, he determined to intrench himself in this shack, until he could by some means get word to the post, now only nine miles away.

The hope was no sooner born than it died. There arose a great shouting and pounding of hoofs behind them, and the three men came galloping after them out of the wood. They had hidden to let them pass. Kenaston struggled hard to pull up, for he saw their plan, but his horse and Curly's, maddened by the shouts and the pounding of hoofs behind them, were not to be stayed.

The whole six of them tore across the meadow as in a race. Stronghead had chosen his spot well, this level, soft stretch of road. Kenaston sensed the lariat swinging around Husky's head. He endeavored to swerve, but his horse was unmanagable. The noose sang through the air, and dropped over Kenaston's shoulders. Instantly Husky's horse, in obedience to the bit, planted his four feet and slid.

Kenaston was plucked out of his saddle like a raspberry from its stem, and flung violently on the ground. His revolver exploded harmlessly as he struck.

To the trooper that was the end of things for the time being.

CHAPTER VII

AT PETE LEDUC'S

WHEN Kenaston came to, it was to find himself lying in a bunk. Sitting up, nauseated and dizzy, he held his splitting head between his hands, and strove to collect his faculties. As sight slowly returned to his throbbing, tortured eyes he made out the usual log-walled interior, and he saw that there was a woman moving about the room. She was a half-breed, not young, built thick and strong like a draft-animal, and with heavy, forbidding features. He recognized her at last as Pete Leduc's wife.

Gradually all that had happened came back to him.

"What time is it?" he asked thickly.

She shrugged, unconcerned for his condition.

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"I got no clock me," she said.

He bethought himself of his watch, and pulled it out. It required an immense and painful effort to focus his eyes on the hands. It had stopped at twenty minutes to twelve.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

"Maybe I t'ink two hours," she said.

"Where did they go?" he demanded.

A walled look came over her dark face.

"I not look," she said shortly.

"Did they leave my horse."

She shook her head. "Take all horses."

"What horses have you here?"

"Pete him go to Mile Fifty-Three with the team," she said. "Gone all day. Only one old horse here; him no good."

"When will Pete be back?"

She shrugged.

"Who knows? Him maybe get drunk, I t'ink."

The effort to force his sick brain to think exhausted him. He fell back in the bunk with a groan. The woman continued about her work.

After a while he began again.

"Is there any man around the place?"

"There is a boy," the woman said. "He is my son."

"Tell him to saddle the horse and bring him."

"You too moch sick to get up, I t'ink," she said with an indifferent glance.

"Tell him to bring the horse," Kenaston repeated irritably.

She shrugged and went out of the house.

He dragged himself out of the bunk. Only his boots had been removed when they laid him down. He managed to pull them on. He could not lace them, because the blood rushed to his head, blinding him with pain. His hat and his revolver lay on the table. Possessing himself of them he made his way to the door. He was compelled to sit on the doorstep and press his head between his hands again.

The woman passed into the house again without looking at him. Presently the boy came out of the stable, leading a broken old horse. He was a healthy looking lad of seventeen with a bright eye; a more human look than his half savage mother. Kenaston was once more endeavoring to lace his boots. Understanding the difficulty, the boy knelt down and did it for him.

"Which way did they go?" asked Kenaston.

Glancing inside to make sure his mother was not looking the boy nodded toward the west.

"All of them together?"

He nodded.

Kenaston slowly worked out his painful train of thought. At first he had meant to ride into the post at Mile Fifty-Three for help, but on seeing the boy he changed his mind. Honesty was written in the lad's clear, bright eye, and he determined to send him. For himself, sick and dazed though he was, a commanding inner voice urged him like a trumpet:

"Follow! Follow! Follow!"

He could not endure lying-by even for an hour. He had to be after them, though it meant footing it as far as Link Agnew's.

"Would you like to earn five dollars?" he asked.

The boy nodded, showing two rows of gleaming teeth.

Producing his note-book Kenaston wrote with infinite difficulty:

DEAR STUKE: Cracked on the head, can't see well. Trouble at Ninety-Two. Ask h'dq'rs for two more men and come quick yourself. Give the boy five dollars for me. KEN.

Tearing out the leaf, he handed it to the boy.

"Give it to the policeman at Fifty-Three," he said. "He will pay you. You take the horse. I have horses at Link Agnew's."

From within the shack the woman started to berate her son in Cree, and Kenaston, who knew a word or two, gathered that she was forbidding him to leave the place. The boy, however, started for the gate, and by his expression of ingenuous delight at the prospect of the reward, Kenaston was pretty well assured he would deliver the note.

They parted at the gate, the boy riding eastward on his hobbling nag, and Kenaston turning his face toward Link Agnew's. As he proceeded he could make out the returning tracks of eight horses in the road.

KENASTON never afterward liked to think of that walk. In addition to the trouble in his head, he ached in every muscle, and the pain in his back was such that he could not stand upright. His whole body cried out for ease and rest, and the exertion of walking brought the sweat

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streaming down his face. He would not sit down, though he staggered on the way like a drunken man, fearing if he stopped he would never have the strength of mind to get under way again.

Most of the distance passed in a blank of pain, with only that imperious inner voice forcing him to keep on putting one foot before the other. It was a little over four miles to Agnew's, and it took him nearly three hours to make it.

This treatment, though it is one that few would care to undergo, is nevertheless efficacious, and Kenaston was better when he got there. However, his body was no longer to be denied. He had to have some sleep. Link Agnew, now that the prisoner had got safe away, was sufficiently hospitable. Kenaston hoped that Stukeley might overtake him while he slept.

Pausing only to make sure that his two horses were all right, and that his saddles and bridles were there, the trooper flung himself into a bunk, and was immediately lost to care.

The inner voice awoke him at midnight. He sprang up remorseful at so many hours lost. He was still sore, but much refreshed in body and mind. Stukeley had not arrived. The old man, hearing him move about, fed him before he left. He rode away under a pale night sky, leading his second horse. At dawn he passed Mile Eighty; at sunup he pulled up at the door of his own stable and put his horses away, just twenty-four hours after he had taken them out.

The first thing he noticed was that the body had been removed in his absence.

Kenaston had no expectation of finding Curly at Mile Ninety-Two. Curly had often talked about crossing the pass and going on down the almost unknown headwaters of the Campbell River, and there could be little doubt that he would do so now. It provided his natural way of escape to the settlements across the mountains, and thence to the Pacific Coast. Curly was an experienced riverman.

The camp was as quiet as when he had left it, no soul in sight; and Kenaston guessed that Curly had already gone on. Otherwise they would surely have kept watch. So he took the time to feed his horses and himself. He bathed, and cleaned his uniform, which had suffered not a little in his fall.

Once more looking his spruce and soldierly self, he felt much better. Mounting his horse again, and leading the other, he rode down between the houses with a bit of a jingle and swagger that was excusable under the circumstances.

They should see that they had not succeeded in downing him!

The sound of hoofs brought sleepy figures in a hurry to the doors and windows, and the word flew about camp on wings that Kenaston was back. Drawing up at Stronghead's, without dismounting he leaned over and pounded on the door.

Stronghead himself opened it, and fell back a step with astonishment writ large on his features. To see Kenaston returned at all was surprising, but Kenaston revived, restored and renovated, Kenaston sitting his horse as if turned out for parade, affected the old man like an apparition. No one at Mile Ninety-Two had ever seen Stronghead lose his *sang-froid* even for a moment before.

"Well I'm ——!" he muttered.

Kenaston tasted his little triumph.

"What did you do with the body out of my stable?" he coolly asked.

"Told the boys to bury it on the hill," Stronghead said. "Seemed more decent than letting it lie around to be gowped at. You can get it any time you want. I have the hat, the gun, the bullet for you, all the evidence. We didn't want to take no unfair advantage."

Kenaston nodded, secretly wondering, and a little dazed at Stronghead's queer notions of fair play. He was ready to kill the policeman in the performance of his duty, but he carefully saved his evidence for him!

Kenaston dismounted.

"Give me the best horse you've got," he said, "and keep these two while I am away."

The police, by arrangement, had first call on Stronghead's horses, so whatever his private feelings were the old man was obliged to accede. A boy was despatched to the stable.

"WHO came back with you?" Stronghead asked curiously.

"Nobody," said Kenaston, flicking his boot.

Stronghead stared, and swore under his breath. Most of the other men were now gathered in the road. They displayed no animosity toward Kenaston, only a strong curiosity and—was it a little sheepishness?

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Stronghead looked around the circle, and called up his sardonic laugh.

"Well, I suppose we're all gone coons here for assaulting a policeman," he said facetiously.

Kenaston saw that he had made real way with them, and he saw his chance to go farther.

"As to that," he said seriously, "you took your chance. If they have me up for losing my man, I have to defend myself. But if I bring him in safely, as I mean to do, I'll make no complaints."

Stronghead stared at him oddly. His facetiousness took on a forced look. A murmur of surprise traveled among the others.

"That's white," murmured Stronghead. "That's white! Look here!" he said aloud, "do you call me a white man?—outside of this here business?"

Kenaston frowned with embarrassment.

"I bear you no ill will," he said.

"Do you call me a white man?" persisted Stronghead.

"Yes, in your own way."

"Good! I could ask no more. Will you shake hands as one white man with another?"

Kenaston was greatly surprised. He offered his hand blushing, and it was well gripped. At the same time he wondered fleetingly what his inspector would say if he could see him shaking hands with the man who had taken his prisoner from him the day before. Life is a complicated thing!

Stronghead's thought was similar.

"This is a mixed-up case," he said with a wag of the head, and one could have sworn he was in earnest at last. "The right seems wrong, and the wrong seems right! But we ain't got nothin' against you. You're dead game, and we respect you for it. I'm sorry we ain't on the same side. I don't know how it will all come out. But if you ever come back among us, you'll see we ain't no desperadoes. And we'll be glad to have you, Rosy-Cheeks!"

The fresh horse was led around, and Kenaston, to cover his confusion, swung himself into the saddle.

"Good-by," said Stronghead. "We hope you'll never get your man, but here's luck to you otherwise!"

Kenaston nodded and frowned, in the effort to keep his face, and prodded his horse's ribs. He trotted away hot-cheeked and filled with a great confusion of emotions. But at any rate it was sweet to win the admiration of an adversary like Stronghead.

He was followed by jeering cries from the crowd, but this time having a certain friendly ring he had not heard before:

"So long, Rosy!"

"Never mind, 'taint your fault you're a lobster!"

"If they kick you out of the force, come back to us, Rosy-Cheeks!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRAIL

WORK on the railway-grade ended at a point half a mile on the other side of camp, and the tote-road ended here also. Beyond, there was only an ancient pack-trail used from time immemorial by the Indians of the plains when they brought their tanned hides to barter with their cousins of the coast-ranges for furs. Over the summit of the pass and down the valley on the other side of Cheval Noir cache, the ancient meeting-place, was a distance of seventy-five miles. At the cache the Campbell River became navigable for canoes, and here the traveler must take to the water. There was no land trail beyond.

When Kenaston struck the pack-trail, the fresh tracks of Curly's horse were plainly visible calling him on. The lust of pursuit sprang up again, and he ceased to bother his head about the whys and the wherefores of the case. He had to bring in his man, that was all. He guessed that Curly had started at daylight, and would therefore have about three hours start of him. From the tracks it was evident that he was riding moderately, under no apprehension it seemed of immediate pursuit.

Kenaston had high hopes of overtaking his man before he took to the water. It was important for him to do so, because Curly was an expert with the paddle while Kenaston could only ride a horse. Nevertheless he curbed his impulse to extend his beast on the bad trail. The troopers are taught that a killing pace is slowest in the end, and that a man's horse must be given full time to graze and rest, however hot the man's own spirit for the chase. Kenaston's horse had to be saved seventy-five miles' worth of a bad trail.

The trail had been rarely used during late years. Being so ancient, it was easy to

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follow, but in the bush it was blocked by the windfalls, and under the heights, heaped for long distances with the débris brought down by snowslides. For much of the way the floor of the valley was set out with a forest of mountain-firs, with here and there an ancient standing apart, superb, unique, kingly in individuality. Through the upper branches Kenaston caught arresting glimpses of dazzling, giddy heights of snow. The actual summit of the pass was so flat he never knew when he passed it. By and by he saw that the stream in the bottom of the valley, now reduced to a mere trickle, was flowing the other way.

About three o'clock in the afternoon his heart leaped at the sight of the ashes of Curly's noon fire beside the trail, in an opening where his horse had cropped the grass.

Kenaston could not tell exactly how long before Curly had gone on, but the black embers were still wet from the water he had thrown on them before leaving. He urged his horse as hard as he dared, and only camped that night out of the sheer necessity of allowing the fainting beast to feed. Next morning he found that Curly had camped only an hour ahead of him—the grass still showed the imprint of his recumbent body. But he had gone on; whether an hour or five minutes before, Kenaston could not tell. The tracks of his horse were very fresh.

For a distance of ten miles this morning, a lake filled the valley, lying squeezed and tortuous between the tremendous heights that hemmed it in. The old trail was merely scratched out of the precipitous face of rock that rose out of the water, and an awful black depth was suggested below. Kenaston's horse trembled and faltered on the way, and anything beyond a slow walk was out of the question. Above the cliffs on either side the timbered slopes had been burned over long ago, and the forests were of bleached gray sticks. The whole scene presented a forbidding and infernal beauty.

Beyond the lake, the way went steeply down, the augmented stream roaring hoarsely through a succession of gorges. Nearing the end of the ride, Kenaston no longer spared his horse, but put him recklessly through and over the obstructions on the old trail. There were innumerable signs that another had ridden hard through there, only a very little while before. But Kenaston got no sight nor sound of him.

He could not mistake when he came to the old cache. He issued out of the mountains through a noble gateway, giving on a broad valley between lesser heights, tending northwestward. The stream pulled itself up in its headlong course, and went on silkily and demurely, like a maiden feigning that wild motion was unknown to her. The site of the old meeting-place was marked by a clearing beside the river. Upon it was a small encampment of Indians—eight teepees. Among their little horses Kenaston quickly distinguished the bulk of Champion, one of Stronghead's best. He looked to his revolver. The Indians were sitting about under their Summer shelters of leaves, but there was no white man visible among them.

OF THE first one he met Kenaston, brusquely putting aside greetings, demanded where the white man who had ridden the horse was.

The words were strange to the man, but he could not mistake the sense. He pointed down the river, and went through the motion of paddling. Pointing to the sun he indicated that it had moved but a few inches on its course since Curly had gone. Kenaston was bitterly disappointed.

These Indians were of the Sapi tribe, no relation to the Crees across the mountains, and their speech was strange to Kenaston. They were a little people and gentle-natured. They hung back shyly under their shelters, contenting themselves with staring at the redcoat, the women snickering among themselves. They were plainly amazed at the advent of a second white man so close on the heels of the first.

The one man who had the temerity to face him, perhaps the head-man, was a wizened little creature, full of quaint, self-conscious vanity. He darted into his teepee and returned with a battered little phonograph and its horn, which he displayed to Kenaston like a little girl with a new doll. He had but the vaguest idea of its purpose, and it was broken anyway, but that did not affect his pride of possession.

Under happier conditions Kenaston would have been glad to mend it for him, but at present he was possessed of a single idea. He struggled to make himself understood. A white man never takes so kindly to the sign language as his red brother. What Kenaston was trying to find out was the nature of the river below.

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When the Sapi understood what he wanted he became graphic. For a journey of four sleeps' distance—four fingers held up, the eyes closed and the head on the shoulder, the river was as smooth as he saw it, but below that, "Wah! Wah!" big billows, sharp rocks, terrible whirlpools, and steep walled canyons, all vividly illustrated.

There was a story concerning five whites on a raft and two in a dugout, not all of which Kenaston understood. But the dénouement was clear; all seven of them had been drowned in the rapids.

Kenaston asked if he would go with him, showing money.

The Indian's eyes gleamed, but his refusal was firm.

Kenaston asked if any man would go, with a like result. His people were not great travelers, the redskin let him understand.

Kenaston surveyed the innocent-dangerous stream that swirled smoothly around a point into the unknown, and the cold hand of apprehension was laid on his breast. He was no waterman. Once embarked on that stream he knew he would have to see it through to the end, for the current was too swift for him to dream ever of returning that way. Hundreds of miles, he knew, separated him from the first white settlements down the river.

But there was no use dwelling on the chances against him. Putting that out of his mind, he applied himself to effecting an exchange of his horse for the best dugout they had, together with dried meat, moccasins and an additional blanket. It was soon accomplished and, immediately pushing off, he concealed his unhandiness with the paddle as best he could until he was hidden by the first bend.

It was lucky, he told himself ruefully, that he was not dependent on his own efforts to make his way. The current gripped his canoe as in a giant hand, and swept him around the points, one after another, forward and back, until he lost all sense of the distance he had gone.

For four days thereafter the world was all his own. He saw no human face, nor any sign of human influence. That other world of men and affairs began to seem immeasurably far off. He found himself talking to himself, to prove that there was such a thing as speech. His acuter apprehensions in respect to the river passed, for it never altered its silky, swift flow around its uncountable points, between the shallow, unbroken, spruce-clad banks. At this season the river filled its bed almost to the brim. Over the trees looked the mountain-tops, with patches of vivid green showing amidst the snow-fields of the summits. Camping under the mighty spruces was like sleeping in the vaulted aisles of a cathedral.

As humanity receded he came into closer touch with wild life. Moose and caribou swam across the river, or crashed away through the bush. Startled beavers flung themselves into the water as he passed. One night a mountain-lion padded around his camp, mewing petulantly like a great cat, and occasionally showing a gleam of green eyes in the firelight. Kenaston reached for his gun, but the cat thought better of his temerity.

Kenaston occasionally saw the remains of Curly's fires along the banks, from which it appeared that he was not gaining on him much. Kenaston did not spare himself like his horse, but what he put in in hard work and long hours, Curly must have made up in greater skill. Sometimes he appeared to gain an hour on him, only to lose it later. Still Kenaston was improving himself daily in the management of his cranky craft. Finally, one morning he found the ashes of Curly's fire just around the point from where he had camped himself. They had actually slept all night within hailing distance of each other!

Kenaston's chagrin was unbounded. If he had paddled but ten minutes more! He applied himself to his paddle with an unspoken vow not to eat nor sleep that day until he came within sight of his quarry.

IN THE middle of the morning, turning into a straight reach of the river longer than any he had passed, Kenaston's eyes were attracted by an infinitesimal twinkling spot far down the river, no bigger than a mote dancing in a sunbeam. The perception of it came to him gradually; it was the regularity of the twinkle that finally arrested his attention. Suddenly, with a bound of the heart, it broke on him what it was—the flash of a wet paddle in the sun!

The end of his long chase was in sight. An immense satisfaction diffused itself through the trooper's breast.

The twinkling spot disappeared around

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the lower bend, and, as the next few reaches of the river were short, Kenaston did not see it again. But every ounce of strength he possessed went into his paddle. Finally, rounding a point longer and sharper than those before, the sight of Curly sprang at him from the center of the picture, a startling sight after so many miles of solitude. There he was, quite close, paddling serenely all unconscious of pursuit, searching the banks idly for new sights as he went. Kenaston bore down on him grimly. Suddenly Curly raised his voice in song, an extraordinary sound there in the quiet wilderness, as if some one should bawl out in church.

Curly never thought of looking behind him. Presently laying his paddle thwartwise, he allowed the canoe to drift, and produced smoking - materials. Kenaston silently covered a third of the distance that separated them. His own heart was beating fast in anticipation of the shock that awaited the other man. He paused only for an instant to transfer the handcuffs from his coat, lying in the bottom of the boat, to his trousers' pocket.

Curly filled his pipe, and his canoe slowly swung around in an eddy of the current. Pressing the last of the tobacco into the bowl, he raised his eyes — to see Kenaston no more than a furlong off.

An involuntary shout broke from each man. Curly snatched up his paddle, and the race was on.

CHAPTER IX

BLACK CANYON

KENASTON'S mind had been too closely bent on the chase during the last few hours to mark that the character of the river after so many miles was at last beginning to change. The mountains pressed closer together, sending out spurs on either side, around the bases of which the river had to snake its way. The banks became higher and bolder, and outcroppings of rock appeared. The current slyly increased its flow, and there was white water on some of the bends.

In one place a shattered spur of brown rock reached all the way across the river, the detached masses sticking up out of the current, and the water pouring through the interstices like sluices. Every moment the scene became wilder and more threatening. But Kenaston, forgetting the dangers he had been warned of, had no eyes for anything but the other dugout two hundred yards ahead. Work as he would, he could not lessen the distance.

Sweeping around the next bend, another great ledge of naked rock came into view, this one unbroken, and apparently extending from shore to shore, blocking the stream. It was only when he came close that Kenaston saw the whole pent-up current escaping through an opening scarcely a hundred feet wide at the end of the ledge. Below, the banks of the river pressed close together, rocky, steep and high, and Kenaston became aware of a deep, hoarse roar issuing from between, that turned his heart to water.

He remembered the vivid sign-language of the Indian, and the story of the seven men who were drowned down here.

Curly stopped paddling, allowing Kenaston to draw closer.

"Land here!" he shouted pointing to the shore. "This is the Black Canyon. You can't go down here!"

The whole place had a horrible look, and Kenaston was tasting fear such as he had never known outside of dreams. But he merely ducked his head a little, and paddled on.

"Land, you fool!" cried Curly. "It's suicide for you!"

There was a voice inside Kenaston which prompted him to the exclusion of everything else.

"You've got to do it! You've got to do it! If he goes down there, you've got to follow!"

Curly, with a shrug, applied himself to his paddle again. An instant later he rounded the point of rock, and the long dugout with an indescribably graceful motion curtsied down with the released current, and was lost to Kenaston's view behind the ledge.

A few moments later Kenaston himself issued around the rock, and the unmuffled roaring of the water below struck on his ears like a clap. He was never to forget his first look of the place. At his bow was a slope of water smooth as ice, spreading out fan-wise below the ledge, and with ugly little eddies writhing and sucking at its edges. At the bottom of the slide the water turned over in an immense comber forever

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rolling without advancing an inch, fixed in Kenaston's path like a wall of water. Beyond, there was simply confusion, a wild dance of the waters, flinging white arms in the sunlight, and roaring louder than a conflagration.

He could see a quarter of a mile of this, as far as a bend in the walls of the canyon. The suggestion of something hidden around the bend was infinitely more terrifying than the worst of what he could see. For aught he knew there might be miles of it to go through, always growing worse. He had a glimpse of Curly, a wildly tossing black spot in the welter below; then he lost him.

He was carried down the slide at railway-speed, but with the odd feeling that he was the fixed spot in the world, and the rocks and the trees on the bank tearing by. His dugout crashed into the foaming comber, and plunged through into the turmoil beyond, enveloping him in a smother of spray. The fear in his breast gave place to a kind of insane exhilaration. He could have shouted aloud. He was no longer capable of thinking. Only an instinct impelled him to paddle like a demon, for only by moving yet faster than the rushing water could he retain a vestige of control over his craft.

Kenaston had seen storms at sea. Here the conditions were reversed. At sea the water is fixed and the waves roll. Here the water rushed down and the waves stayed in their places. Under him the dugout was tossed and thrown into grotesque postures, like a dervish. He watched it detached, as something in which he had no great concern. The most persistent motion was a series of crazy plunges over the strange, fixed waves. The boat was too short to reach from crest to crest; too long to take the contour of the hollows. Consequently she either had to break in two or stick her nose in. She did the latter, and the crests of the waves fell aboard, as heavy as stones, until Kenaston wondered how she still floated.

There was a narrow channel, now on one side, now the other, where the water was deepest and roughest. Kenaston's eyes caught and clung to it ahead by intuition, and so guided his craft. On either side as he shot down, broken rocks reached out for him, showing their fangs and snarling horribly. Close along shore were quiet little pools, where sticks sailed slowly round and round as if moved by clockwork.

Before he knew it he was around the bend. His heart leaped in his throat to see close ahead, where the shaft of a big undermined spruce-tree reached close over the stream. The end had been broken off short, but the channel of the current, making in under that bank, carried him straight for the butt. He thought it was all over and, closing his eyes, waited for the crash. But he never ceased paddling, and somehow he got safely around the end.

THERE was a second and a sharper bend before him. When he was swept past the point, through the smother, he sensed the end of the canyon-walls ahead, and a suggestion of smooth water, welcome as light to a man recovering his sight. But he had not yet won it. The rapids reached their wildest culmination in the efforts of the water to escape out of the trap laid for it by the bend in the walls of rock. A whirlpool, or a series of whirlpools, seized Kenaston's canoe and swept it around and around in disport of his feeble efforts with the paddle. The dugout staggered under the impact of opposing currents, and the waves leaped aboard from every direction.

Paddle as he might, he could not escape that infernal circle. No sooner had he made a yard than he was caught and thrown back. The water came at him from all sides at once. The dugout filled and he could no longer guide it. The uproar and the confusion bewildered him like a nightmare. He waited for the end to come. Suddenly his boat was thrown into a quiet backwater under a jutting point of rock. There was a strip of beach two yards wide, on which beat a miniature surf. The dugout staggered drunkenly, and sank under him as her nose touched the sand.

Scarcely knowing how he had been saved, he scrambled out on the land and, pulling up his boat, rescued what of his goods had not already been washed away, and dumped out the water. He looked about him, a little dazed, and his heart sunk, for he saw that his backwater was above the whirlpools, and he must still force his way through that incredible turmoil in order to escape.

His courage failed him at the prospect. It was too much to ask a man to brave the jaws of hell twice in succession. He sat down on the end of his boat staring at the place stupidly.

But when a thing has to be done, it has

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to be done. Very soon a better heart returned, and he got up, ashamed of his momentary weakness. At any rate, he told himself, he had now the advantage of being able to study the place before committing himself to it. He climbed the rocks a little way in order to get a bird's-eye view of what was before him. Descending again, he launched a log out of the backwater, and carefully watched what befell it. By this and that he discovered that close under the opposite wall of the canyon there was a channel where the water escaped through, comparatively unhindered. If he could manage to get his boat over on that side before he was caught!

A fit of recklessness succeeded. He quickly launched the dugout, almost gay at heart, and eager to get it over with.

"What's the differ!" he said aloud. "Whether it ends now or fifty years hence! A man can only do his darndest!"

Paddling up to the top of the backwater, he headed obliquely across. The current snatched him violently, and he was instantly engulfed once more. Again he could not tell what was happening, but only paddled like a machine driven at top speed. The roar filled his ears. The spray blinded him. He felt the shock of the waves leaping aboard. But he managed to skirt around the edge of the worst place, and when he came to, once more floating in quiet water in a half-sinking condition, the turmoil was all behind him.

The walls of the canyon fell back, and a lovely little lake was spread to his view, with high green banks all around, and offering an unruffled bosom to the sun. Out in the lake a few hundred yards away lay another dugout, its occupant anxiously watching the mouth of the canyon. Kenaston felt a great sense of relief. The boy had come through all right!

At sight of the other, Curly, too, sent up a cheer. Kenaston's mind glanced at the oddity of the situation, the two of them engaged in a desperate chase, and each worrying about the other's safety.

Kenaston was obliged to land on the point to empty his dugout of water. Out in the lake Curly waited and watched. Throwing in his sodden outfit again, the trooper took after him with a will. Curly, with a derisive wave of the hand, set off down the lake. He did not paddle his hardest, and Kenaston had the irritating sense that the other, sure of his ability to escape when he chose, was only playing with him. He overhauled him appreciably.

The little lake made almost a perfect round, about half a mile in diameter. After the uproar they had come through, it conveyed an effect of ineffable peace. It had no outlet that Kenaston could see, even as they drew close to the other side, but he suspected Curly knew where he was going. On this side precipitous cliffs of yellow rock rose out of the water, and the trooper guessed that the current found its way around a corner of the rock that was invisible head-on in the strong sunlight.

He was right. He finally saw the hole that the lake poured its waters into, like a barrel discharging its contents through its bung-hole, or like the torrent out of a leader in a shower. A sharp bend in the walls of rock closed up what was beyond. At first Kenaston could see only the hole, but he heard the voice of the place, and imagination pictured the long plunge and the boil-up below. His heart began to beat painfully again. How much more of this had he to go through!

He was now within a hundred feet of Curly, and Curly was loafing. Finally he stopped paddling, and turned his head.

"Come on, Rosy-Cheeks," he taunted. "Here's another bit of white water! Come on down if you're not afraid."

The taunt had a tonic effect on Kenaston. He set his jaw and drove his paddle home. Curly allowed him to come within ten yards before he got under way again. The two were precipitated down the slide with only a dugout's-length between them. Kenaston did not remark how Curly took to one side. He instinctively held to the middle. Past the points of rock like sluice-gates confining the discharge, Curly with a dexterous twist nosed his dugout into the backwater. He spun around and almost rolled under, but righted in still water. Kenaston, seeing the maneuver too late, was swept helplessly by. He heard a laughing call behind him:

"So long, Rosy-Cheeks!"

CHAPTER X

WHITE WATER

IMMEDIATELY engaged with the boil-up at the foot of the slide, Kenaston forgot Curly and everything

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else. This place had a very different look from the first canyon. This was the typical canyon, with smooth walls of rock rising sheer out of the water. There was no such mad turmoil as he had been through, and comparatively little uproar. Nevertheless it had a sinister look, and there was something terrifying in the very silence between the walls.

Kenaston was not long in finding out wherein the danger lay—whirlpools. There was an S bend in the narrow walls of rock, and the escaping current, thrown from side to side, and thrown back on itself, was twisted into great silent whirlpools, continually forming and spinning and bursting, only to form again. It was like the stirring of a spoon in a bowl, which carries a train of little whirlpools in its wake—only these were ten feet across! There is something inexplicable and uncanny in the force of a whirlpool that lays a cold hand on the heart.

Kenaston was thrown helplessly back and forth by the diverse currents. A whirlpool yawned beside him, a horrible black hole without any bottom, so close he could have leaned over and dropped his hat into it. It raced along beside him for a space, and burst. Another began to spin close ahead. Paddling desperately, he sought to evade it, but his bow was drawn in as by a magnet. He hung there for a terrifying moment, bow slowly sucked under, stern rising, the whole craft drunkenly agitated like a reed in the current. He could do nothing but cling to the sides. Then suddenly the water boiled over him. The dugout lurched. He was hurled out of it.

He struck out instinctively, but it was as if a giant hand closed about his ankles, and slowly drew him down. He went down, straight on end, and spinning sickeningly, down to the very bowels of the river it seemed. Then suddenly the force was reversed, and he was violently thrust up on the surface.

He had but a glimpse of the sky and a taste of sweet air, when he felt himself seized again—as by a monster lurking under the surface, and was drawn down despairing, drawn down slowly until his head was like to burst. He tried to draw water into his lungs and so end it, but the instinct of self-preservation was too strong.

He was cast up on the surface again in a half-conscious state. This time a human hand closed firmly in his hair, and he heard a voice command, as from an immense distance:

"Hang on to the stern, and strike out with your legs!"

He gripped the gunwale, as only a drowning man can grip. Curly wielded the paddle desperately, dodging the whirlpools. Finally they were swept out into the placid river once more.

Curly headed for the shore, and when the bow of the dugout grated on the shingle, Kenaston crawled out on hands and knees, and cast himself down to get his breath and his senses back. Curly pushed off again. Kenaston wondered without caring much if he was being abandoned there, empty-handed. But Curly's purpose was merely to secure the second dugout, which he had spied coming down with the current, bottom side up. He brought it ashore.

SO THERE they were, reunited once more. They had been through too much to feel any sense of strangeness at the situation. Everything was taken for granted. All that Kenaston said was, when he could speak:

"What did you do that for? One boat's enough now."

Curly shrugged and smiled dryly. "Oh, you can't let a good boat go to the deuce."

By the smile Kenaston knew that he intended to escape at the first opportunity. Nothing more was said for a good while.

As a matter of fact, Kenaston was pretty badly done up. He could only lie and wait for his strength to come back. Curly showed a certain gruff solicitude. Building a rousing fire on the shore, he forced Kenaston to undress and roll in the blanket he gave him, while he spread the trooper's clothes to dry. Meanwhile, by his scowling, uneasy glances, it was clear Curly had something on his mind. It finally transpired.

"Look here, Ken," he blurted out, "you know I wasn't trying to drown you by getting you to go in there. It must look like it."

"Sure, that's all right," said Kenaston quickly. "Chances of war."

"But I thought you'd get through easy, since you navigated the Black Canyon all right. Gad! It gave me a nasty turn when I saw you go under."

"What did you stop for, anyway?" asked Kenaston. "You would only have had to

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follow me down after I had gone down."

Curly smiled secretively again. "There's more than one way of skinning a cat—or a mounted policeman," he said. "You don't know this country as well as I do."

Speech was somewhat difficult, but there was amity between them—helped out by tobacco-smoke. Kenaston was secretly full of admiration for Curly's coolness, resourcefulness and ready humor; while Curly was no less astonished by the trooper's unconquerable gameness, and a little ashamed, maybe, that the odds were so much in his own favor.

At the same time Curly was determined upon escaping, while Kenaston, knowing it, was equally determined that he should not escape.

When his clothes were dry, Kenaston dressed, and announced his readiness to go on. Curly shook his head.

"You've got to have a good rest," he said. "We'll both be better for a couple of hour's sleep."

They crawled side by side within the one pair of blankets they had, and Curly, like an honest man and a healthy, instantly fell asleep. Not so Kenaston. Every fiber of him craved sleep. He knew that it would be like the sleep of the dead, once he yielded to it, and he suspected that Curly meant to leave him the blanket, perhaps, and half the food, and clear out while he was unconscious. And yet he had to have sleep.

He felt in his trousers' pocket for the handcuffs he had slipped in upon first catching sight of Curly. They were there. He drew them out, and sitting up, weighing them in his hand, debated the painful choice he had to make. Curly had saved his life—how could he now take advantage of his sleep? His head was splitting. He half wished he hadn't been saved. But, since he was, there was no choice. The thing had to be done.

With a sigh, he turned back the blanket, and snapped one of the bracelets on Curly's left wrist, the other on his own right. He then lay down, and slept, too.

HE WAS awakened by a sharp tug on his wrist. Curly was sitting up beside him, laughing.

"That was a sharp trick, all right," he said, without any ill will. "Take 'em off, and I'll cook the dinner."

Kenaston had no intention of taking them off, but the idea of appearing ungrateful made him sick at heart. Avoiding the other man's eye, he said in a low tone:

"I suppose you won't give me your parole!"

Curly stared. "——, no!" he cried. "You didn't take me. I could have escaped if I'd wanted to let you drown. I owe you nothing!"

"Sure, you owe me nothing," said Kenaston unhappily. "But that's not the point."

Curly rattled the chain impatiently.

"Here, take 'em off," he commanded. "We can't go around tied up like a brace of hounds."

They stood up, Curly looking impatiently for the production of the key. Kenaston drew it slowly out of his pocket. He glanced at Curly as if asking his pardon, and with a quick movement tossed the little key as far as he could into the river.

For an instant Curly stared stupidly at the spot where it had disappeared. Then his face became suffused with red, and he flung upon Kenaston with an oath.

"So this is what I get for pulling you out of the water!" he cried.

It was a bitter situation for both. Kenaston's soreness blazed up in anger as hot as the other man's.

"I didn't ask you to save me," he cried. "I was willing to take my chance. If you're sorry you saved me, you've got your gun. I left it to you while you slept, on purpose. I'm willing to have you get away any time—that way."

Curly turned away.

"What do you think I am! You know you've got it on me!" he muttered sullenly.

KENASTON and Curly moved about together on the shingles, replenishing the fire, and putting on water to boil, exactly as Curly had said, like two dogs in a leash. Nothing enrages a young man so much as to be made ridiculous in his own eyes. This hurt Curly more at the moment than the fact of his having lost his chance to escape. Add to this the wild hatred a man conceives for the thing he is tied to against his will. Curly muttered and swore and jerked Kenaston this way and that. Kenaston bore it with considerable patience, but patience has a limit. There came a time at last when Curly, giving Kenaston a vicious pull, was promptly

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jerked back again. In an instant they had flown at each other.

Surely never fought two men in a stranger case! They could not reach each other; they could not get away. They thrashed up and down the beach, panting, slipping on the stones, striking and fending with their free hands, passionately jerking at the steel chain that bound them until their wrists were bruised and bleeding.

For the moment Kenaston was as wild to break the bond as Curly. It soon came to a clinch, an ineffectual clinch, hissing in each other's ear, straining and staggering and wearing themselves out to no purpose. Science and fair play both went by the board in their madness. Curly had a great advantage, for it was his right arm that was free, and he had not been half drowned that day. Kenaston went down at last, Curly kneeling on his chest, his free hand on the trooper's throat, and madness in his eyes.

Kenaston's strength relaxed, and a strange look appeared in his eyes. One would almost have said he smiled. The sight dashed Curly's anger. His hand fell from the other's throat. He got up.

"Why do you look at me like that?" he asked hoarsely.

He had to repeat it.

"I thought," Kenaston whispered huskily, "what a good way to settle up the matter. I wish you had ended it."

Curly's rage passing left him sick and dispirited. He turned away with a groan.

"I don't know what it's all about," Kenaston went on apathetically; "I like you, more than you will ever know. And Stella. But I know nothing. You all put me in the wrong, somehow. But I've got to go on with it while I'm alive. You ought to have let me drown."

Curly made no answer. The situation was too confused, too painful.

By and by, pulling themselves together, they ate in silence, and afterward embarked, always in silence, leaving the second dugout on the beach. Bound as they were, it was impossible to paddle, so they sat in the bottom of their boat, and let the current carry them. They turned their backs on each other, and affected to be studying the scenery.

This was an intolerable situation, for each one carried a warm and generous heart under his shirt. It could never have been guessed from their scowling faces that each young man was acutely unhappy, and longing to bridge over the gap, without knowing how to begin. It was Curly who spoke first.

"Say, Ken, I acted like a beast," he said gruffly.

Kenaston made no answer, but turned his hand in the manacle and gripped the hand that was bound to his. The pressure was instantly returned. They felt enormously relieved and embarrassed. Somebody had to say something quick to relieve the situation.

"I say, Ken," Curly blurted out, "lend me your hand a jiffy to fill my pipe with. I'll give you the lend of mine any time."

They laughed, and breathed more freely.

CHAPTER XI

THE FACE AT THE BARS

NINE days later, after a journey of twelve hundred miles, Kenaston brought his prisoner safely into headquarters at Carlingford. He received no particular commendation for his feat. Such things are taken as a matter of course in the force.

There had been no more exciting adventures *en route*. On the day after the fight, a serious obstacle to their journey had presented itself in the Gilchrist rapids, a long and dangerous descent.

But as they sat on the shore debating the seemingly hopeless problem of how two men handcuffed together might navigate the perilous channel, two Indians appeared poling up-stream, and a bargain was struck with them to act as pilots. The red men were frankly amazed at the predicament of the whites, but such was the difficulty of explaining the situation by signs that Kenaston gave it up. Without doubt a tall story was carried to the teepees.

On the afternoon of this day they hove in sight of a cluster of buildings on the shore, which Curly said was Fort Edward, the farthest outpost of civilization on this side the mountains. Kenaston immediately landed, not wishing to show himself and his prisoner. The mounted police have no jurisdiction this side of the mountains, and Fort Edward enjoyed an unholy reputation. Kenaston suspected it might be considered in the light of a good joke to separate him from his prisoner. He had lost his red coat

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in the canyon; to render himself still less conspicuous, he now blackened the yellow stripe on his breeches with charcoal.

They floated past the settlement before dawn. At this point the Boardman River comes into the Campbell, and the united streams turn at right angles to the south on their long journey to the Pacific. They were now likely to meet travelers at any time, a prospect welcomed by neither. In a new country it is difficult to avoid stopping and giving a full account of yourself. Our two young men were sensitive as to their extraordinary union.

They had their first encounter with a white man as they sat on the bank smoking and digesting the noon meal. He appeared slowly poling an ancient dugout against the current, close under the bank, meanwhile holding animated converse with his dog.

"Yes, I know I got rotten drunk, Boko, but a man had ought to get drunk sometimes for the good of his soul. These sober fellers they get so puffed up with pride they can't keep the ground, but an ornery human man, he gets drunk and he feels like thunder, and it makes him humble, Boko. And the good book says: 'Blessed are the humble and meek.'"

"Turn around," whispered Kenaston to Curly, "as if we were making a back-rest for each other."

This attitude concealed their handcuffed wrists from the river side.

Seeing the other dugout, the voyager called in his monologue, and searched the bank for its owners. Greeting them without any embarrassment, he came ashore. A little spaniel sprang after him, shook himself, and frisked about to stretch his legs.

The newcomer offered his hand in turn to Curly and Kenaston. The latter was compelled to give him his left.

"Wrenched my other wrist," he said carelessly.

The stranger sat down and, producing a pipe, settled himself for a good gossip. He had the queer, naïve, original look of one who has lived long alone. His garments exhibited an intricate patchwork design. His hair hung to his shoulders.

He followed up the invariable opening; "Where you from?" with all the other stock questions of the stranger's catechism.

Kenaston answered guardedly, and the newcomer made up his mind that they were prospectors who had stumbled on something "good" up the river. The glitter appeared in his eyes that is always associated with the thought of the yellow metal. Kenaston let him think what he would.

He volunteered some information about himself.

"They call me Crusoe Campbell," he said, "along of my wearing my hair long, and always living alone. Me and Boko's company enough. Times we trap when the fur is good. Times we work for wages when the grub-stake is low. Times we prospect a little, and times we just trip and look at what there is to see. I was brought up careful, though. An easy-going, wise old bum, that's me—Crusoe Campbell!"

When Kenaston could get in a question or two on his own account, he learned that they had seventy-five miles of smooth water to Lecky's Creek, where the canyons and the rapids began again, and the river became impassable, except for short stretches, all the way to the coast. A little steamer ran between Fort Edward and the Creek, but she had gone down only the day before. At the Creek she connected with the weekly stage for Yewcroft on the railway, three hundred miles south of where they were. The stage was due to leave the following morning.

Hearing this, Kenaston became anxious. Traveling by the aid of the current alone, they would have all they could do to make it. He devoutly wished that Crusoe would continue his journey, but the old man was enjoying himself too well.

He set about preparing a meal.

"It's good to have somebody new to talk to," he confessed. "These fellers up and down the river, they don't appreciate me."

Finally, there was no help for it. Kenaston nudged Curly, and they rose. The tie that bound them could no longer be concealed. Crusoe's jaw dropped, and his eyes seemed about to start out of his head.

"What the deuce——!" he began.

Kenaston and Curly climbed somewhat sheepishly into their canoe.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" shouted Crusoe.

Kenaston waved his hand, and pushed off. As they passed out of sight they heard:

"All the way from Cheval Noir Cache, linked up like the Siamese twins. What do you know about that, Boko?"

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DURING the rest of the day, and all night under the light of the Aurora, they floated down the smooth, swift stream, sitting back to back in the narrow dugout, and helping her along with little paddles Kenaston had contrived, suitable to the use of one hand. They chewed dried moose-meat to keep themselves up, and drank from the river.

They were in time for the stage. At Lecky's creek they found the end of the telegraph, and came once more into touch with the world. Kenaston reported to headquarters at Carlingford, and asked that another man be sent to meet him at Yewcroft. Covertly looking over the other intending passengers on the stage, he saw to his relief that they were mild citizens, not likely to interfere with an officer in the performance of his duty.

They found Sergeant Markley waiting at the railway, and Kenaston was able at last to yield up his responsibility. The three of them returned over the mountains by train to Blackfoot; thence north *via* the branch line to Prince George, and west over the new line to Carlingford, where they arrived at last, having almost completed a gigantic circle since the chase started from Pete Leduc's.

On the fourth night after their arrival, Curly and Kenaston were playing checkers in the little log shack that served for a guard-house at headquarters. Kenaston had been assigned with another trooper to alternate in guarding the prisoner, and to-night it was Kenaston's trick.

Curly generously refused to bear him any ill will for his capture, and as a result they were on closer terms than they had ever been. To-night the devil of restlessness had hold of the prisoner. Losing the game, he swept the men off the board, and jumped up.

"Can't play any more," he said. "I've got the jumps to-night. I don't know what's the matter with me. Do you believe in premonitions, Ken?"

"Wouldn't know one if I saw it," said Kenaston.

"Don't laugh," said Curly frowning. "Men always laugh, and make out there's nothing in it. They know better! There's not much use you and me making believe to each other after what we've been through!"

"Get it off your chest," said Kenaston. "I don't laugh at what I can't understand."

"When a man lives much in the woods," Curly went on, "his senses seem to become sharpened somehow. He feels things that he can't explain. He has warnings. The natives are more sensitive to it than we are. In the fur-camps, myself, I have heard old Etzeeah say, 'The trader is coming to-night. He is coming from the south,' and send out a man to bring him in. There are too many proofs. You can't deny the thing."

"I don't deny it," Kenaston said. "I only say it never happened to me. What of it?"

"Well, I have that feeling now," Curly said striking his breast. "Something is going to happen, or something has happened. I don't know. I seem to hear some one calling me, calling me, and here I am tied hand and foot."

"But any man when he's locked up feels like beating the door with his fists," said Kenaston.

"It's more than that. I didn't feel this way at first. I can't help worrying—about Stella."

"She has the whole camp to take her part."

"I know. But there's something wrong!" He took an impatient turn up and down. "How long have I got to stick this out?" he said irritably. "When are they going to put me up on trial anyway?"

"There's the case to prepare, and witnesses to bring down," Kenaston answered. "Court opens in nine days. I suppose they'll be ready then."

"Nine days!" cried Curly. "How will I ever put them in?"

"But after that?" asked Kenaston guardedly. "Are you so sure of getting off?"

"We can prove it was in self-defense."

"Then why were you so keen to get away?"

"Of course it looks foolish, now that I'm caught," said Curly. "But—well, we were afraid the facts might come out."

Kenaston could not help stiffening whenever the mystery showed its veiled face. He felt that his friend ought to confide in him as a friend, but pride would not let him speak of his grievance.

"If they should send me up, Stronghead and the boys will never rest until they help me break out," said Curly carelessly.

"You shouldn't tell me that," said Kenaston, frowning.

Curly laughed.

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"I should think you'd be satisfied with bringing me in and convicting me. You'll get great credit out of this case."

"A fat lot I care about that," said Ken sorely.

His tone arrested Curly's attention.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

The grievance peeped out at last.

"Nothing," said Kenaston bitterly. "You talk about our being friends and all that, and you keep me in the dark; you don't trust me."

Curly came and gripped the other's shoulder.

"I can't tell you, Ken," he said simply. "But you mustn't think it's from any lack of trust in you. Put yourself in my place. At the trial, they'll have you on the stand, and if I tell you anything it will have to come out. We have sworn among ourselves that we will all hang, sooner than have the story come out in court. Only wait until after the trial, and whether they decide to hang me, or lock me up, or let me go, I swear I'll tell you as my friend everything that led up to the shooting of Baldy. Are you satisfied?"

Kenaston nodded.

"Let's have another game and forget about it," he said gruffly.

"Before we drop the subject I want to ask you a favor," Curly said diffidently and earnestly.

Kenaston looked his question.

"I don't know how much you know, or what you've guessed, but I want you to promise me you won't bring Stella's name into the case in any way. You can see I'm in deadly earnest when I say I would rather hang than drag her into this."

"I promise," said Kenaston shortly.

They shook hands on it, and turned to the checker-board, more moved than either would show.

THE game was about half through when both men were called to sharp attention by the scratching of a finger-nail on the window beside them. Kenaston thrust the lamp to the other end of the table. Outside the window they made out, with a shock of surprise, Stronghead Gilbey clinging to the bars, smiling and nodding reassuringly.

"I knew it," muttered Curly.

Kenaston, with a strange mixture of feelings agitating his breast, leaned over the table and flung up the window. Stronghead, thrusting a great ham of a hand, between the bars, grasped Curly's hand, then Kenaston's with an equal will. Kenaston saw that he took and held Curly's hand in a peculiar fashion, but he supposed it was the sign of some secret order both belonged to.

"Well! Well!" said Stronghead jovially. "Here we are again! I just got in. Open the door, and I'll come in and smoke a pipe with you, and we can talk things over."

Now Stronghead was not ordinarily disposed to the jovial manner, and Kenaston's suspicions were instantly on the alert.

"Sorry," he said. "It's against all rules. You can come in to-morrow morning if you get a permit from the inspector."

"Permit! Here I am!"

"I'm not allowed to let you speak to Curly," said Kenaston. "You'll have to go."

"You can't stop me saying what I want from here," said Stronghead.

"There's an alarm-bell on the roof. I have only to pull the rope in the corner there——"

Stronghead laughed agreeably, again. It was not like him to be so pleasant in the face of a rebuff.

"Gosh! here's hospitality for you!" he said. "It's a cold night, boy, to be standing around outside without a fire."

"Sorry," said Kenaston. "Come back in the morning."

"I'm not armed," said Stronghead. "I'm alone. I'll come in hands up, and you can search me at the door. What more do you want?"

There was more of this back and forth, and Kenaston's patience began to wear then.

"What's the use, Stronghead?" he said. "Apart from the regulations, you know yourself I'd be a fool to listen to you after what has happened."

"Well, have it your own way," Stronghead said with a shrug.

Turning away, he disappeared.

Kenaston, leaning across the table, peered into the darkness to make sure he was going. He finally closed the window, and turned back. During his colloquy with Stronghead, Curly had been standing slightly behind him, and close to the lamp. He had not spoken. Turning to him now, Kenaston was dumfounded at the change he saw.

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Curly's ruddy-brown color had paled to a sickly yellow. His eyes stared sightlessly before him, and between his parted lips his teeth showed clenched together, as a man clenches them to keep from crying out in agony.

CHAPTER XII

THE PAROLE

"WHAT'S the matter?" Kenaston stammered.

He could not take in the evidences of his senses. He had seen nothing to account for such a shocking change in Curly.

Curly, with a gesture of helplessness, turned and, crossing the room, flung himself face down on his cot.

"Why, what's the matter, Curly?" Kenaston repeated, following him, all at sea.

Curly merely groaned. The sound seemed to be torn from his very entrails.

Kenaston, mystified and profoundly moved by the sight of his friend's distress, very naturally lost his temper.

"Tell me what's the matter," he said sharply, "or cut out this foolishness."

Curly got up from the bed. He could not keep still. He walked back and forth grinding his teeth, Kenaston watching him with a frown. Finally he approached the policeman and, averting his face, held out a crumpled piece of paper. He made several attempts before he could speak.

"Stronghead passed it to me," he said in a husky murmur.

And Stronghead had been making talk merely to give Curly time to read it! thought Kenaston.

Returning to the table, he spread the paper under the lamp, and this is what he read—there was no salutation:

> Tain't likely the police will let us talk private so I'll write this out and slip it to you. Stella is sick. She's been fretting about you ever since. At last she come down with a fever. We've got the Doc up from Mile 83. She's too sick to be took down to the hospital there. Three days now she's been clean out of her head. All the time she calls for you. When anybody comes in she jumps up and cries: "Here he is!"
>
> The Doc says she's burning herself up. I made him give it to me straight. He says we must produce you if we want to save her. So I've come to get you. All night I'll have an engine waiting with steam up on the siding. At the end of steel I got horses waiting saddled and bridled. Stop at nothing. If you can't make it by yourself to-night, we'll get up something together in the morning.

When Kenaston finished reading, the eyes of the two young men met. One was now as pale as the other.

"I told you I heard her!" murmured Curly.

Kenaston's breast was transfixed with awe.

They continued to stare at each other with eyes that scarcely saw for horror. Slowly the full hideousness of the case he stood in was revealed to the trooper. What he had been through was laughable beside this. Here was the girl dying, the engine waiting on the siding, the key in his, Kenaston's, pocket, and only his oath, like a flaming sword, barring the way.

"Oh, what did you show it to me for!" he gasped.

"You're going to let me go," said Curly unsteadily, "or I've got to kill you!"

Kenaston fell back a step, touching the hilt of the revolver in his belt.

"You fool!" he cried harshly. "I'm armed."

"I could have killed you before you turned around," Curly said. "With my hands. But I held myself. You are my friend. You are going to let me go."

Kenaston drew his revolver.

"You've got another guess!" he cried.

"All right," Curly said in the dull voice that seemed to have no relation to him. "Shoot me and kill us both. What's the difference? But you've got to choose."

"There's nothing to choose," Kenaston said. "I will not let you go. It's not fair to ask it."

Curly's voice rose and broke at last.

"Fair!" he cried. "What is fairness at a time like this! You think a lot of your brass buttons, don't you! More than of a dying girl—— O my God! Stella dying!"

His cries were like knives in Kenaston's breast. The pain of it made his brain reel.

"I will not let you go," he repeated stupidly.

"I'll come back," Curly said eagerly. "Give me two days to go, two days to see her through, or to bury her, and two days to come back. I swear I'll give myself up again within a week. Look at me and you'll know I'm telling the truth!"

Kenaston shook his head.

"I can't do it," he muttered.

"Then shoot me, and end it," cried Curly passionately. "I saved you out of the river. I held my hands to-night when I could have

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strangled you—because you were my friend. What does it mean to you? Nothing! You're not a man at all but a wooden block!"

As passion loosed Curly's tongue, pain hindered Kenaston's. Curly was always the readier of speech. Kenaston could not express himself. His words lagged and fell under the burden of his pain.

"You don't understand," he said, speaking with infinite difficulty. "It's not brass buttons, or lives, or friendship. I can't do it. When you take an oath you can't break it. It's something stronger than you. I can't talk about it!"

"An oath!" Curly scornfully flung back. "It's a kind of conceit! Hang my friends, but let me keep my oath! There is little Stella lying out of her head with pain and trouble, and calling me, calling me — O God!—and you stand there stiff and correct and talk about your oath. You're a cold-blooded imitation of a man!"

KENASTON had reached the limit of what he could bear.

"There is still a way out of it," he said very, very quietly. "You know where the key is."

He raised the revolver and aimed it—at himself.

A swift revulsion of feeling passed over Curly. He leaped across the room, and held his friend's hand.

"Ken, for God's sake!" he cried in a voice sharp with fear. "There's no need of that! I thought you didn't care! I thought you didn't feel anything. What would I have done if you had——! There's no need of it. I'll be back in a week. Can't you stand a week in quod for me? They'll let you out when I get back."

"Yes, disgraced," muttered Kenaston.

Curly's arm went swiftly around his shoulders. He still trembled at the narrowness of their escape from tragedy.

"That's what you say," he went on with rough tenderness. "But a man doesn't need to feel disgrace because a certain gang is down on him. There are other men and other places. And I know you're the bravest and truest pal in the world. Anyway, you still have your gun. I know you won't want to use it when you think, but you can if you insist on it. Only promise me you'll hold your hand for a week!"

"Very well," Kenaston said, slipping the gun in its holster.

Producing the key, he unlocked and unbarred the door, and flung it wide. The night air enveloped them.

Seizing hat and jacket, Curly paused to throw his arm around Kenaston's shoulders again.

"God bless you, Ken!" he murmured brokenly. "I never knew a fellow like you! We're none of us worthy to tie your laces!"

Kenaston closed the door after him, and mechanically locked and barred it again. He flung himself on the cot.

HINGSTON, the Inspector in charge at Carlingford, himself not much more than a youngster, had a great liking for the youngest man of his command, and was secretly very proud of his exploit in bringing in Curly Briscoe. All of which made the scene between them next morning the more painful. When the astounding news reached him, he sent for Kenaston, and interrogated him in private. It did not last long, for Kenaston, realizing the preposterousness of trying to justify himself, stuck to the bare statement:

"I let him go. He will be back in a week."

The repetition of these two sentences roused Hingston to an insupportable pitch of exasperation. One must know something of the history of the mounted police, and have entered into their fanatic devotion to an ideal of duty, to understand the incredulous amazement that filled the young Inspector's breast. To his mind such a thing simply *could not be!*

"You fell asleep!" he cried. "He stole the key from you!"

"If he had escaped I would have given the alarm," said Kenaston dully. "I let him go."

"You let him go!" shouted the Inspector. "After chasing him hundreds of miles, and nearly drowning yourself, and spending Heaven knows how much of the country's money! If it was only to let him go, what did you bring him in for? You're mad! You ought to be in a strait-jacket!"

Kenaston made no reply. What was there for him to say? He only longed to get the scene over with.

"Do you know where he's gone?" demanded the Inspector.

"I can't tell you," muttered Kenaston. "He'll be back in a week."

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The exasperated Inspector sprang to his feet. "If you say that again——! Don't tempt me too far! You insult my intelligence. Did you ever hear of a man coming back of his own free will to be hanged? You're mad, I tell you!"

He strode up and down his quarters. "To think that a madman should have the power to ruin us all like this! You've disgraced the force! You've undone all my work here! You've dragged our colors in the dirt! You've made us laughing-stocks for all the thugs and blacklegs up the line!—we who held our heads so high! The men will tear you limb from limb if they get hold of you!"

Kenaston stood, listening dully. He had already taken so much, his very capacity for suffering was exhausted.

"What am I to do with you?" cried the Inspector.

"Lock me up for a week," muttered Kenaston.

"And then?"

Kenaston shrugged.

The Inspector sent him away. He was stripped of his uniform and locked up under guard in the same hut where he had stood guard the night before. His guards did not spare him. Meanwhile the Inspector took measures to trace and pursue the fugitive. It was quickly discovered that he had gone west up the line. Two men were despatched on his trail.

A WEEK later Kenaston faced his superior officers again. This time Inspector Hingston appeared as his accuser before the court martial that had hastily been called. No less a person than the High Commissioner himself sat at the head of the table, to hear this unprecedented and inexplicable case. The Surgeon-General was also present for the purpose of observing the prisoner, and passing on his sanity.

At the conclusion of his examination of the prisoner the Surgeon turned to the Commissioner saying:

"I am obliged to state, sir, that the accused trooper appears to be in the full possession of his faculties."

The head of the force looked at Kenaston with the same expression of incredulous, amazed anger, that the face of every officer present showed.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked.

Kenaston shook his head. In the seven days that had passed he seemed to have aged more than twice that number of years. A nature such as his suffered intolerably under the contempt of his fellows. No one knew what he had been through, and no one would ever know, for he could not speak his feelings. He felt their anger and hatred surrounding him like a wall. Anything he might say would only make matters worse.

Anyway, there was nothing to be gained by speaking. If Curly returned before the day was out, it would justify him—partly. If he did not, Kenaston fully intended to end the matter in his own way. During the week opportunities had been left in his way of ending it. It had occurred to more than one man as the only possible mitigation of an unspeakable disgrace.

"I regret that we are forced to abandon the theory of insanity," the Commissioner began in icy tones, "for it provides the only charitable explanation of your act. You are a young man of first-rate antecedents, hitherto a credit to the force. You accomplished a difficult capture in the face of great odds, and brought your man in according to the best traditions of the Service. Four days later, according to your own statement, you opened the door of his prison of your own free will and let him walk out. You refuse to speak for yourself, or to explain your act. I am therefore driven back on the ugly supposition that you were bribed."

Kenaston flinched as if he had been struck across the face with a whip. It seemed there was a degree of pain he had not reached even yet.

"How you expected to benefit by a bribe, I can not say," the Commissioner went on; "nor why, if you were bent on casting honor, decency and the good repute of men to the winds, why you did not try to escape with the prisoner. You have had a fair trial. You have been invited, urged, commanded to speak in your own defense. In your continued refusal to do so I must believe the worst, and my duty is clear. It is but just that you should suffer the penalty your prisoner would owe the law for the offense of which he is presumably guilty—manslaughter." The commissioner stopped. His lips pursed. Then, grimly, distinctly: "George Kenaston, the sentence of this court is that you shall be confined——"

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HE GOT no further. There was a commotion outside, the sound of running feet and voices raised. There was a scuffle with the sentry outside the door, then the door was banged open, and Curly Briscoe strode in, flushed and breathless.

Briscoe and Kenaston had no eyes for any one there but each other. A cry broke from Kenaston, the first utterance of the intolerable agony, so long bottled in his breast. His stiffly held figure wavered—and went down in a heap.

Curly sprang to him, and lifted him up, thrusting others aside. He put him on a chair that some one pushed forward.

Kenaston was conscious, but shaking like a leaf. Leaning over him, with an arm around his shoulders, Curly whispered swiftly:

"I was delayed. I couldn't let them take me, and bring me in, as if I wasn't coming myself. It's all right. She's better. She's going to get well. We owe it to you!"

The court was in confusion. For once the starched officers had lost their impregnable self-possession.

"Who is this man?" the Commissioner was heard to ask.

Half a dozen voices informed him.

"Give an account of yourself, Briscoe," he commanded.

Curly straightened his back and, keeping his hand on Kenaston's shoulder, faced the Commissioner resolutely and respectfully. "I am not in your command, sir," he said quietly. "Why he let me go, and where I've been, are matters between him and me only. I am here ready to stand my trial."

"Very commendable of you," the Commissioner said sarcastically. "But the fact of your returning does not excuse him for letting you go in the first place. And your defiance of the court will not help him."

Curly saw that he had made a mistake.

"I'll tell everything but my own private affairs," he said eagerly. "I can testify for him. If you want men on the force there's a man for you, the gamest and the truest that ever wore your uniform!"

Kenaston already recovered, stood up again, blushing and scowling, mightily ashamed of his moment of weakness, and embarrassed by Curly's enthusiastic eulogy. Curly had no shame in displaying his feelings; he stuck close to him, with his arm about his shoulders, while he addressed the court.

"We were friends before this trouble began," he went on. "We each needed a friend at the time, and we meant a lot to each other. But when he found out that I shot Baldy Hafner——"

"Hold on!" interrupted the Commissioner. "You must know that anything you say here may be used against you later."

"I know it," said Curly coolly. "I say when he found out that I shot Baldy Hafner, he never let friendship interfere with his duty. He made a stand against the entire camp; he risked his life not once but half a dozen times; food and sleep and rest were nothing to him until he brought me in.

"Once in a while something happens that is above the law. It was so that night a week ago. I showed him I had to go. It was a matter of life and death. There was no time to tell the Inspector. He either had to let me go at once—or risk the death of one who was very dear to both of us. I can tell you that much. You needn't think it was easy for him. He turned his gun on himself, and told me to take the key off his body. I stopped him from pulling the trigger. I made him promise he'd wait a week before doing it. If I hadn't come back he would have ended it to-night. I tell you, if you break him for this, there's no justice, no fair play in your force, and what's more, you're breaking the best man you ever had!"

The court arose in confusion. Kenaston and Briscoe were confined separately under guard. Later, after stormy conferences between the officers, it was rumored, the High Commissioner asserted his authority, and reïnstated Trooper Kenaston.

He was relieved from active duty until the trial of Briscoe, at which he was required as a witness. Afterward, it was intimated to him, he might expect to be transferred to a post in the far North.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRIAL

CARLINGFORD was the brand-new county-seat of a brand-new county, of which the trial of Curly Briscoe was the first to be spread upon the record. It was at the terminus of the latest-completed division of the new railway. Three afternoons in the week a train came staggering

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over the billowy road-bed from Prince George, the capital, and the three following mornings it staggered back. The town was not a beautiful place. A single wide street stretched away at right angles from the track—not so much a street as a troubled morass of pasty yellow mud, bounded on each side by a wooden sidewalk raised high on piles. Wo to any wayfarer who ventured or fell off the sidewalk! When a citizen desired to cross the street, he went down to the depot-platform and came back on the other side!

Short branches of the elevated sidewalk led off to the packing-box houses, likewise built on piles. The houses were painted in delicate shades of pink, green or yellow, and set off with big signs; restaurants, pool-parlors, cash-stores. Up at the head of the street on higher ground stood the building of the Mounted Police establishment, which antedated the railway. These were more substantial-looking structures of squared logs, whitewashed. There was a flagpole with a Union Jack making a bright spot against the sky. The background of Carlingford, whichever way you looked, was filled up by wide, flat stretches of boggy clay covered with charred stumps, and the scrub of a later growth.

The rough newness of Carlingford differed markedly from the the rough newness of Mile Ninety-Two, and there was an even greater difference in the spirit of its dwellers, all the difference between something tame and something wild. Civilization and Progress were ever on the lips of the Carlingforders. They had come to stay. They drove bargains, speculated in real estate and put their money in the Bank of Commerce. Their feeling toward the prodigals of the construction-camps was naturally therefore one of severe disapprobation, mixed perhaps with a resentful envy.

There was no court-house yet, and the trial was held in Ed Sollers' pool-room, the largest floor in town. The pool-tables were knocked down and removed, that no such suggestions of frivolity might impair the dignity of the proceedings. A dais was built for the judge, a box for the witness and a kind of miniature grand stand for the jury. Prisoner, lawyers and witnesses sat below, and the general public was railed off in the body of the room.

The space was not sufficient, for all the business of Carlingford and the surrounding district was suspended on the day of the trial, and men women and children came crowding to share in the delicious excitement of seeing a man on trial for his life. Those who could not get inside crowded about the door and the windows, feeding upon the crumbs of information that were passed out.

The affair of the shooting was still shrouded in mystery, which greatly increased the excitement. A score of fantastic stories were in circulation. It was positively known that the prisoner admitted the killing. The rest was guesswork. In the main, sentiment ran against him, though the women were for him because he had lustrous, curly hair and gleaming teeth—but they were not on the jury.

The men, pleased with their new toy of a court, desired to see it do something. Moreover there were ancient insults to be avenged.

"We'll show these outlaws from up the line that they can't put it all over us," was the feeling.

The young Crown-attorney felt that he had both jury and citizens with him, and consequently swelled with self-confidence. The even younger lawyer, the only other lawyer in town, who represented Curly, felt it too, and was correspondingly dispirited.

Even his Honor the circuit judge, a little crab-apple of a man, who sat in his silken gown behind a deal table looking like a remote abstraction of justice, soon showed that he was against the prisoner too. To offset all this there was Stronghead Gilbey and the other witnesses from Mile Ninety-Two. Feeling the adverse current they displayed their zeal for the prisoner to a degree that was injudicious. Thus feeling in the courtroom ran high.

GEORGE KENASTON was the principal witness for the Crown. On the stand the trooper still showed the effects of what he had lately been through. There was nothing of the boyish remaining in his grim set face. On the other hand Curly was confident and unruffled. The two friends avoided each other's glance. Kenaston told his story with a dogged attention to detail that told of a painful duty almost overfulfilled in the determination to fulfil it.

Layburn, the Crown-attorney, a sanguine, aggressive young man with red hair

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and a raucous voice, was drawing the story out. Kenaston was his only important witness, and the trooper's lack of animus against the prisoner annoyed the lawyer a little.

"You say you arrested him the morning after you discovered the body," he said. "Why then was there such a delay in bringing him in?"

"He escaped," said Kenaston.

"Ah!" cried Layburn, flinging a meaning glance toward the jury. "I hadn't heard of this before. How did he escape?"

Kenaston hesitated for the fraction of a second. This was the part of the story he did not want to tell. But he had to.

"When I was bringing him in over the tote-road," he said, "some of his friends pursued us. Near Pete Leduc's I was roped from behind, and pulled off my horse. The fall stunned me. When I came to he was gone."

"Who roped you?"

"Husky Decker."

"Who was with him?"

"Stronghead Gilbey and Jim Bent."

Layburn looked pleased at the mention of Stronghead's name.

"Desperate men!" he exclaimed. "Interference with an officer in the performance of his duty. This is a serious offense. Why haven't you laid a complaint against Husky Decker?"

"Because I brought my man in," said Kenaston. "It would look like spite if I complained against him now. It would injure my usefulness as an officer if I were stationed among them again."

"But hasn't the fact that the prisoner tried to escape an important bearing on this case?"

"I didn't say he tried to escape. The rescue was got up by his friends. He did not help them in any way."

"But he preferred to run off with them rather than stand his trial, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Kenaston, "but you must put against that the fact that later, when he had got safe away, he saw my canoe upset in the Campbell River, and he came and pulled me out. That is how I got him."

"Stick to the answers to my questions, please," said the lawyer sharply.

Kenaston's generous anxiety to see that the prisoner received his due had the effect, unforeseen by him but quite natural, of prejudicing the jury in Kenaston's favor at the prisoner's expense.

Layburn asked abruptly:

"Have you a friendly feeling toward the prisoner?"

Kenaston flushed.

"I don't see what that has to do with this case," he said quickly. "I brought him in."

"And a mighty creditable piece of work, too," said the lawyer suavely. "But answer my question, please. Have you a friendly feeling for the prisoner?"

"Yes," said Kenaston.

"Thank you, that is all," said Layburn with a meaning smile in the direction of the jury. "Mr. Caswell, the witness is yours."

The mystery enveloping the case was not lightened to any degree until William Gilbey was called to the stand for the defense. At the sound of his name the crowd stirred in anticipation, and necks were craned. Stronghead's reputation was great in the land. He propelled his great body deliberately toward the witness-stand, and dropped into the chair, showing his characteristic ironic smile.

"YOU were an eye-witness to the shooting of Baldy Hafner?" began Caswell.

"I was," said Stronghead grimly.

"Please tell the court what you saw."

The crowd sat up with attentive ears.

"Well, as the policeman has testified, there was trouble in my place that night," drawled Stronghead, "and it finally narre ed down between Baldy and Jim Kettle——"

Layburn jumped up. "I object," he said. "How do we know that this had any bearing on the case? What was the 'trouble'?"

"Overruled," said the Court. "You will have an opportunity to question the witness directly."

"It narrered down to Baldy and Jim Kettle," repeated Stronghead, "and it was agreed to settle it with pistols at thirty yards. So we all went out in the road in front of my place."

"Who was present?" asked Caswell.

Stronghead gave a list of their names.

"Go on."

"I measured off the distance, and they took their places. It was a fair night, and at that season there was light enough for them to aim by. Johnny Trudeau was

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Jim's second, and Slim Pete Waters acted for Baldy. Jim was facing east, and Baldy facing west. At midnight what little light there is comes from the north, so neither had any advantage that way. The rest of us stood half-way between them, but back from the road among the stumps, out of range. Curly Briscoe was the nearest to Baldy. I stood a little in front of the others with a white handkerchief in my hand. When I dropped it, that was to be the signal——"

Stronghead made a dramatic pause. The silence in the room suggested that every breath was held.

"Go on!" said Caswell sharply.

"Before I dropped the handkerchief," Stronghead said slowly, "Baldy turned and fired pointblank at Curly Briscoe. The bullet went wild. He fired again. Curly ducked, and the bullet went through his hat. By that time Curly had his own gun out, and he shot him dead. What else could he do? Baldy had four more bullets in his gun."

Stronghead came to a stop, and a long breath escaped from the crowd. Another surprise was sprung when Caswell immediately turned the witness over to his adversary.

It was not altogether Caswell's fault that he appeared to be handling his case so badly. Both Curly and Stronghead had forbidden him to ask certain obvious questions.

Layburn faced Stronghead, bristling like a terrier, while Stronghead smiled down on him with grim benignity suggesting a mastiff. At the same time any one who knew him well could have told that Stronghead was anxious. Indeed, this was the critical point of the case. Layburn rashly undertook to fence with him a while before getting down to serious business.

"I understand they call you Stronghead Gilbey," he said.

"They do."

"How did you earn that distinguished appellation?"

Stronghead's smile broadened.

"A kind of term of affection the boys give me," he said slyly. "Along of my supposed ability to carry a load without staggering under it."

There was laughter in the court—largely from Stronghead's party.

"I see!" said Layburn sarcastically. "What were the boys all doing at your place on the night in question? Drinking?"

"Yes," said Stronghead, "orange-mead."

This was received with a roar. Layburn abandoned this line of questioning in some discomfiture.

"You are a friend of the prisoner?" he said.

"I am," said Stronghead promptly.

"You would do anything to get him off."

"Anything short of lying."

"Are you sure?" sneered Layburn.

A vein stood out on Stronghead's forehead. He held himself in. After a brief pause he said with ominous mildness:

"I'd be glad to have you repeat that to me outside, when this case is over, Mr. Layburn."

"Stick to your answers," snapped the lawyer.

"Stick to your case," retorted Stronghead.

This led to a general wrangle in which the witness, both lawyers, and finally the Court took a hand.

When quiet was restored Layburn said, with a glance at the jury to take them into his confidence, "Why, if this was a clear case of self-defense such as you have described, why did you go to such trouble to hide the body? And when it was discovered, why did you take such desperate means to rescue the prisoner?"

Stronghead hesitated. On the one hand he had sworn not to lie. On the other he had sworn not to let the truth come out, and between the two he was graveled. He managed to keep his face, but little beads of perspiration sprang out on his forehead. He finally fell back on facetiousness.

"Why, wouldn't we be wanting to save this young county the expense of a trial?" he said.

Layburn flushed.

Turning to the Court, he said: "Your Honor, I ask that the witness be admonished against making flippant answers."

"Repeat the question," directed the Court.

The attorney did so.

Stronghead had been holding himself under a tight leash. He was filled with a strong man's detestation of the sneers, the cheap smartness, the offensive vanity of the Crown-attorney. Brought to bay his self-control snapped. His eyes blazed, and his voice was the voice of the mastiff in anger.

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"I'LL tell you why we rescued the prisoner!" he cried. "We are free men, and we can settle our private affairs without outside interference. We want to see justice done, and we set no store by the justice of lying newspapers, and thievish little lawyers, and womanish counter-jumpers that measure men with their yard-sticks."

It did well-nigh irreparable damage to his friend's case. An ugly murmur passed through the room. Every man of Carlingford was touched to the quick. Every man on the jury scowled.

There was another wrangle between counsel. Afterward Layburn proceeded, highly pleased by the visible effect of Stronghead's outburst on the jury.

"You were the head-man at Mile Ninety-Two, the mayor?"

Stronghead had himself in hand again.

"Just after a manner of speaking," he said ironically. "Nothing official."

"And you let this go on, you arranged the details of the shooting?"

"It was Baldy's own idea to leave it to the guns," said Stronghead. "And it was the will of the crowd. Neither me nor nobody else could have stopped it."

"Why did you have the policeman tied up, and carried to his shack?"

"For the same reason I have just given you. We didn't want no interference in our private affairs."

"If the duel was arranged between Baldy and Jim Kettle, why did Baldy suddenly turn on Briscoe and shoot?"

Again an infinitesimal pause before Stronghead answered. He quickly recovered himself.

"Don't ask me what evil was in his black heart," he said carelessly.

"You have no right to cast aspersions on the dead!" cried the lawyer, virtuously indignant.

"Strike out the adjective," ordered the Court.

"What was the quarrel between Jim Kettle and Baldy, the original quarrel? What were they going to fight about?"

Stronghead shifted his quid to the other cheek, and recrossed his legs.

"Well, that was not so much Jim Kettle's quarrel as mine," he said. "But the boys wouldn't let me stand up to Baldy, though Baldy was keen for it, because they said I was a better shot than him. So they drew lots for it, and it fell to Jim Kettle."

"A lottery!" sneered the lawyer, "with every chance against Baldy!"

Caswell objected, and was sustained.

"What did you have against Baldy?" continued Layburn.

"There was a matter of fifteen hundred dollars owing him——"

"Aha!" cried the lawyer. "Now we're getting at it! He came up to collect what was owing him, and he got killed for his pains."

"Not so fast," said Stronghead grimly. "I had the money there to pay him. I have the money at this moment to pay to his executors, or to anybody the court may direct. They all saw me offer it to him, but he was ugly and he refused to take it. He wanted to fight me for it."

"Do you mean to tell the Court that you owed the man fifteen hundred dollars, and he preferred to stand up and be shot at rather than take the money?"

"That is the truth."

The Crown-attorney gave way to derisive laughter, in which some of the jury so far forgot themselves as to join.

"How do you explain such an extraordinary situation?"

"I don't explain it," Stronghead said bluntly. "You can take it or leave it. There were about twenty witnesses."

"What did you owe him the money for?"

Stronghead's face hardened. He was ready for this question, and there was no uncertainty.

"That is my private business," he said. "I refuse to answer."

Layburn appealed to the court, and his Honor directed the witness to answer.

"Meaning no disrespect," said Stronghead with a kind of grim politeness, "a man has his rights. I refuse to answer."

The Court, a little nonplused by the witness's firmness, took the question of punishing him for contempt under advisement. Meanwhile Layburn returned on his tracks.

"Do you know why Hafner shot at Curly?"

Stronghead shrugged. "There had been hard words passed," he said. "A while back, Curly called Baldy a ——"

The court-room appeared to relish the forcible Saxon epithet.

"Every man of you was against Baldy?" suggested the attorney.

Stronghead fell into his trap.

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"We were," he said promptly. "We hated and despised him. That's why we were so set on seeing strict fair play done."

Layburn sneered, and looked at the jury. "You hated and despised him?" he repeated.

"That's what I said."

"That is all," said Layburn abruptly.

ONE after another the eye-witnesses to the affair gave their testimony. Nothing new was brought out. They all corroborated Stronghead in every detail, and refused to answer the question he had balked at. No one was deceived by their apparent anxiety not to divulge Stronghead's private affairs. It was felt by all that the real key to what had happened lay in the answer to that question: "What did Stronghead owe Baldy Hafner the money for?"

Jury and public alike felt cheated at the prospect of the case ending in as deep a mystery as it began. Layburn, observing the working of baffled curiosity in the jurors, was not ill-satisfied to have the witnesses defy him. When half had testified, he gave up cross-examining them in affected disgust.

The prisoner's friends damaged his case beyond repair.

When he arose to sum up, Layburn carried judge, jury and spectators in his hand. Excepting the judge, they were not educated up to the decorum of a long established court, and they showed in their faces they were only sorry they could not hang the prisoner.

"Manslaughter" and "twenty years" were whispered from one to another in the courtroom.

All this redounded to Layburn's self-esteem. He swelled and strutted and spouted for an hour and a half. Measured by the standards of Carlingford, it was a wonderfully fine speech. Recalling how they had seized the policeman and prevented him from witnessing their fell proceedings, how cunningly they had gone about concealing the body and how desperately they had striven to rescue the prisoner, he demanded to know if these were the acts of innocent men. He dwelt on the fact that every man at Mile Ninety-Two was the self-avowed enemy of the deceased, and he pointed out the suspicious unanimity of the stories they had told.

"What good is the evidence of these men," he asked, "when they have shown that they will stop at nothing in order to get the prisoner off?"

He drew a damning indictment from the refusal of the prisoner's friends to tell all they knew about the case.

"You have seen to what lengths they will go to help him," he shouted. "You can be sure they would tell all that lay behind the shooting if their dear friend had no guilty share in it!"

He went on to suggest terrible things that had been kept back. Inferentially he had a strong case. Loud applause followed on the conclusion of his speech, suppressed with difficulty by the Court.

It began to look serious for the prisoner. Curly lost his confident smile, and Kenaston, under the mask of the trooper, showed harassed and anxious eyes for his friend. At a safe distance one may laugh at the prospect of a long jail-sentence, but it ceases to be funny as it draws close—when one is young!

Curly and his friends, secure in the rectitude of their private consciences, had not spent any thought in getting up their case. Now it appeared to them as if they had made a mess of it. This thing called the Law, which they had despised in their ignorance, had Curly in its horrible tentacles.

CHAPTER XIV

A WOMAN'S HONOR

COUNSEL for the defense in his summing-up was effective in inverse ratio to the confident Layburn. The unfortunate young attorney, whose own client and his friends would not support him, had not a leg to stand on. He was brief.

The case hurried to its conclusion. His Honor charged the jury in the good set phrases of judicial impartiality. He eliminated murder in the first and second degrees, but made it clear that he expected them to bring in a verdict of manslaughter.

He was interrupted before he reached his peroration. An excited boy came pushing his way through the crowd at the back of the room and, rushing to the rail, leaned over and whispered in Caswell's ear. The Judge stopped his address, and frowned. The dispirited young lawyer jumped to his feet as if electrified.

Without consulting the prisoner, he said breathlessly:

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"Your Honor, I ask the indulgence of the Court. I have just been told of a witness who has important testimony to give for the defense. I move to reopen the case."

"This is most irregular——" began the Judge.

"I assure you it is as much a surprise to me as to your Honor," said Caswell.

"Well, produce him," snapped the Judge.

"It is a woman," said Caswell.

The prisoner turned to his lawyer with a startled, whispered question. Caswell nodded.

"I forbid you to question her," Curly whispered imperatively.

Caswell shrugged.

"It's too late," he said.

The spectators quickly surmised that something dramatic was in store. The prisoner stood up and turned a strained, white face toward the door. Every eye followed his. During the wait, men could hear the ticking of their watches.

Finally two women were seen slowly making their way through the press at the door. When they issued from among the standers, a low, breathed exclamation escaped from the crowd. Their dramatic expectations were more than realized. It was a girl, pale, fragile, sweet as a snow-flower, with a face heroic in its lines of pain and resolution. The other woman was obliged to support her.

It was Stella Gurney. As she slowly passed up the aisle she swept a glance around the room, and the wistful beseeching sweetness of it changed the whole course of popular opinion in Carlingford.

They did not understand yet who she was for, but they were ready to be for her. A murmur of sympathy followed her.

Reaching the rail, she addressed the Judge breathlessly:

"I am not too late?"

His Honor, moved, upset, exasperated by this intrusion of the dramatic into his sober court, grunted inarticulately.

The prisoner leaned toward her.

"Stella, I forbid you to say anything," he commanded in a low, shaking voice.

"Silence!" shouted his Honor.

SHE merely smiled at Curly with a sad sweetness, and allowed Caswell to lead her to the witness-chair. She gave her name to the clerk in a low voice, and was sworn. The faces of the men of Mile Ninety-Two showed a strange study of apprehension, anger, pity and acute discomfort. They alone knew what was coming. This was what they had tried so hard to prevent.

Caswell arose to question her.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I did not hear your name. Will you please repeat it?"

"I have been known as Stella Gurney," she said softly, "but my legal name is Stella——"

"Well?"

"Stella Hafner."

An involuntary exclamation broke from Kenaston. He half rose. A companion pulled him back into his seat.

"What relation, if any, were you to the dead man?"

Very low—"I was his wife."

It had the effect of a thunderclap on Kenaston. All that had been hidden from him became clear, as in an accompanying flash. It was too sudden. For a moment the room seemed to spin. Stronghead and the boys avoided each other's eyes in shamed wretchedness. The prisoner extended his arms on the table and dropped his head between them. But while they all suffered thus for Stella, the girl herself seemed to be borne up by an inner strength. The crowd gaped and wondered. They had thought the drama was over, and here it was beginning again.

"One moment, Mr. Caswell," interrupted the Judge. Addressing Stella, he asked, not ungently: "If you know anything bearing on this case, Mrs. Hafner, why did you not come forward to testify before?"

"I did not know there was a trial," she said. "It was only by accident that I heard a woman talking about it at Mile Ninety-Two day before yesterday. They kept it from me on purpose."

"Who kept it from you?"

"Stronghead and the others. They wanted to save me the pain of testifying here. Stronghead told me he had escaped. Why he came to me——"

"Came to you?" echoed the Judge in astonishment. "The prisoner?"

In the look of horror that overspread the faces of Curly, Stronghead and Kenaston, Stella saw that she was making a blunder. She quickly caught herself up. She hung her head.

"I was very sick," she murmured. "Out of my head for many days."

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His Honor nodded sympathetically, and a wave of compassion passed over the crowd. The men who were in the secret breathed freely again, as at a dangerous corner safely rounded.

"Proceed, Mr. Caswell," said the Judge.

"Do you know what events led up to and resulted in the death of your husband?" asked the lawyer.

"I do."

"Please tell the story to the Court in your own words."

"Before you begin," interrupted the Judge, "I must warn you to confine yourself strictly to matters of your own knowledge."

Stella nodded, to show that she understood. She paused for a moment with her eyes fixed broodingly on the lowered head of the young prisoner. Presently she began in a low, firm voice:

"In order to make my story clear, I must begin a long way back. I was born and brought up in the village of Waterdown, in Ontario. My mother died when I was seventeen years old, and my father went away without telling me where he was going. I did not see him nor hear from him for five years. I taught school in Ancaster near-by, and lived with friends. In March this year I heard from my father at last. He wrote from Prince George to say that he was sick and in want and to ask for help.

"I started west immediately. I had my savings. I felt I had to come. He was the only person in the world belonging to me. I found him in cheap lodgings in Prince George. He was very sick. He had led a bad life, he told me, but—but he was my father!"

She paused, and closed her eyes, as if to gather strength. She resumed, in a quiet, toneless voice in which there was something more affecting than tears:

"Three days after I arrived in Prince George my father was arrested under an old charge. The charge was obtaining money under false pretenses. He was accused of swindling poor settlers. He told me—that he was guilty."

Layburn arose with an objection. "A very affecting story," he said with an ill-concealed sneer. 'But what has it to do with this case."

Stella looked at him full. "You will see," she said quietly.

For the first time there was a murmur against the self-confident attorney throughout the room. He no longer carried the spectators with him, and he was quick to feel it. The Judge overruled him.

"When my father was brought before the Judge," Stella went on, "he was so sick that they had to postpone the case. The Judge offered to let him out on bail. Fifteen hundred dollars was what he asked. My father knew only one man in town with money; that was Hafner, him they called Baldy Hafner." She paused, and a strong shudder shook her body. "My father sent for Hafner," she went on, very low, "and he came to the jail when I was there. They let me be there because my father was sick. Hafner came every day after that. The first time he said he had not the money. Afterward he said he would do it for my sake."

She was obliged to stop again. It could be seen that her breast was laboring with sobs. Most of the spectators had known the unspeakable Baldy, and the horror of her tale was therefore strong with them. They affected to gaze out of the windows, reluctant to intrude upon the sight of her pain. After a while she went on:

"HE SAID—he said he had fallen in love with me. He said if I would marry him he would put up the fifteen hundred dollars, and let my father escape, and forfeit the money without saying anything. My father cried and begged me to do it. It seemed such a dreadful thing to have him die in prison. I thought—I thought they would bury him some place where I could not go. I was nearly out of my mind. At last I gave in. The man promised to let me alone as long as my father lived. We knew that could not be very long.

"He furnished the money, and my father was released. I was married to Mr. Hafner in Prince George on the twentieth of April. Right afterward my father and I started west, and after wandering from one place to another we finally hid ourselves in the farthest camp we could find in the mountains. That was at Mile Ninety-Two. My father lived for two months longer, and I was almost happy there. The men were all so good to us—I mean these men here. I did not know there was so much kindness in the world. One of them—one of them——" She paused with a piteous look at Curly.

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"The prisoner?" prompted Caswell gently.

She nodded. The tears were flowing now. She lowered her head, and they fell on her tightly clasped hands in her lap.

"He was the youngest," she whispered. "He told me he loved me. He knew nothing of what had happened. He told me many times. And I loved him. But I hid it from him. I hid it though I thought it would kill me. I kept him away from me. I lived like an honest wife. They will all tell you that."

Caswell urged her to stop for a while. All the women in court were weeping with her—and more than one man.

She recovered a little self-control, and went on in a scared hurried voice:

"My father died at last. The day after the funeral the man came to claim me. I had made up my mind to kill myself. I couldn't think of what I was doing. That night I tried it, but the mounted policeman pulled me out of the water. Afterward we heard the men quarreling in Stronghead's place, and I sent him there. He didn't know, but I knew that Hafner had told the men what he had come for. They had raised the fifteen hundred dollars between them to buy me off, and he wouldn't take it.

"A woman came to my cabin to stay with me. I listened there, not knowing what was happening. By and by I heard them all come out of Stronghead's place. Something told me there was desperate work afoot. I ran down there.

"I saw them all standing around so quietly in the half-darkness. I saw Hafner with his pistol in his hand. I saw Curly standing near him. I was crazy with fear. I thought Curly's life was in danger. I ran to him to shield him. That was why Hafner shot. He swore, and fired at us, at Curly or at me, I do not know which. He fired twice. Curly pushed me behind him, and fired at Hafner, and killed him.

"You can not punish him for that!" she cried, rising with a wild gesture of appeal to the jury. The Judge rapped on his table in vain. "He was only defending me! If any one is guilty of this man's death—" she struck her breast—"it is I! And you must punish me!"

WHEN the proceedings were finally reduced to order again, his Honor, suspiciously red as to the nose, said gruffly:

"Mr. Layburn, do you wish to cross-examine this witness?"

The Crown-attorney seeing the jury industriously blowing their noses, and pursuing stray tears with casual forefingers, saw that his case was lost forever, and glumly shook his head.

"Mr. Caswell?"

Caswell felt that his witness was a better advocate than he.

"I rest, your Honor," he said.

Turning to the jury, the Judge cleared his throat, fussed among his notes, and made two false starts. Finally he said, almost peevishly it sounded:

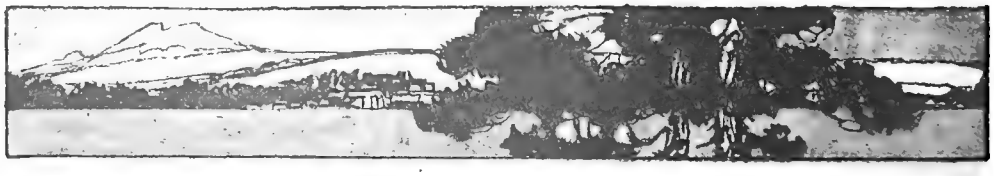
"There is only one thing I need add to my previous remarks. If you are satisfied that this prisoner shot in self-defense, you must acquit him, for it is a man's inalienable right to defend himself when attacked. You will now retire to your deliberations. I will remain here to advise you on any point of law that may arise in your discussion. Gentlemen of the jury, you have a great responsibility. It is your privilege to establish the first precedent of justice in this county. The people look to you to do your duty as men and citizens!"

But the jury made no move to rise. They exchanged significant glances. The foreman leaned over, and consulted briefly with each in turn. There was much nodding of heads; much pounding of fists on knees. The foreman arose.

"Your Honor, we are ready to report our verdict," he said.

"Gentlemen of the jury do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty as charged?"

"Not Guilty!"



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The Silver Creese at Bongo-Bongo

by Donald Francis McGrew

THIS, my story (said Tommy Patten), is a tale of the Silver Creese. It is only one of the tales of this wondrous blade, yet, like the rest, moonlight goes with it, and madness, and the mystic film of hot Southern seas and tangled islands. At mention of it Mohammedans say the houris of the seventh heaven shake their heads in sorrow; and interblended with it are the nodding boughs of the old, old palms and the throbbing notes of the surf-boom, which, coming softly, resemble the sob of a hula across a moonlit lagoon.

Those who claim to have seen the Creese gain ready audiences over siphon-bottles, calabash or betele-cushro. The estimates of its intrinsic value are high and fabulous, and are accepted credulously or scoffingly, as the case may be. But men seek it. The Moros sing of it awesomely in their chants. Speak of it to a Moslem and he will salaam three times toward his image of Mohammed. On the broad far sweeps of the South Pacific many a blunt old sea-captain will look at you sideways and nod his head at mention of its name.

And this is the story:

I went ashore off the *Maid of the Sea* at Leeano-Lanee, met a woman there and did her a service. A Kanaka who had fallen into the ways of a hashish-fiend sought to throw his arms around her waist in one of the crowded market-lanes. I gave the Oahu boy a right hook—the fist, the arm, the shoulder, the body raised on the toes, all in one instant. He fell some distance away, and then I turned to look at the girl.

I had to. Yes. By the twisted-faced gods of the Sumarii, she was a woman! I could not determine her nationality, though she had the Polynesian tint of skin. She had cheeks of cream and olive, masses of blue-black hair and a form that would have brought all the slave-dealers in Samorka tumbling over the sands in red-hot haste.

But her eyes held me longest. She had eyes, man, eyes! But you wouldn't understand. What do you know of women and eyes, you land-locked fellows who sit at home in swivel-chairs? That girl had eyes of the deep color one sees far down in the cool, deep grottoes of a clear still tropical bay.

I stood there, looking at her. I looked, and couldn't think. I only wanted to go to her—by the red gods, I had been looking for her a long time! But I had a picture in my pocket and, somehow, it held me an instant; and while I stood there in indecision, she smiled and was gone.

It was some time later when I met Savoy,

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drinking at Canton Louey's bar. Savoy was a lieutenant in the South Sea police, a man of whom I knew little save that he was a policeman, but with whom I had scraped up a superficial acquaintanceship at various ports south of the line. As soon as he saw me he came at me with a proposition to go along with him on a hunt for Chan Loo, one of the most notorious outlaws who ever operated in the South Pacific.

I fell for it like a duck to water. You bet! I was young and foot-loose, and the proposition had the bloody old lash of the whip in it. I shifted my dunnage from the *Maid of the Sea* to the *Oahu Pearl* right there.

SAVOY'S explanation was simple enough. Chan Loo, a tough customer, was strongly ensconced at Bongo-Bongo with a murderous crew from New Caledonia, all escaped convicts. He had taken refuge there after looting old miser Reef's plantation on the Marshalls, from which he had taken the contents of Reef's safe, some twenty-five hundred pounds. Thus, Savoy said, old Reef paid for his stubbornness in not banking with the Company when he knew the Company's paper to be as good as gold. Still, what was done was done, and he had been told to deputize as hardy a set as possible to handle the situation.

They were hardy enough, I'll swear to that. The crew of black boys, eight in number, had sole handling of the boat, under a Huahine mate, who drove them with a pair of hardy fists and a vocabulary of hobgoblin English. Beside the Rapa boys, there were eight Kanakas, three of whom handled the auxiliary gasoline-engine with which the boat was equipped. Besides these, there were two dark Frenchmen, who had been guards at New Caledonia, and looked it, and a young American named Reilly, picked up off the beach at Choisell.

Matters soon adjusted themselves socially aboard. The Frenchmen and Savoy seemed to find much to talk about most of the time, and kept to themselves, as did the Kanakas and the Rapa boys; Reilly and I were thus thrown together. I liked the cut of that boy; too prime for a fight, he had been jerked from the stoke-hold of a liner at Choisell. Even if he did run nearly naked like most of the Darwinites who have been touched by the southern sun the flash of his teeth and blue eyes as he smiled was good to see.

I sought him often. When the purple mists of evening came down over the sea, I'd get to thinking of that girl's eyes in spite of the picture in my pocket, and oft-times when, looking over the *hammada* in the desert and listening dreamily to the *muezzin* calling to prayer, I had pictured the one woman, come down the ages to me. But those aren't good thoughts to have, when, thinking you've found her, she turns out to have Polynesian in her, and you have a picture of a girl back home. So I sought Reilly.

It was toward the last of the monsoon-season, and the air was thick and heavy with moisture. At times, away to the right, the sun beat down in glaring clearness, while to the left and not over a half-mile away, the sea was pelted and frothed by squalls of rain. On the eve of the night Savoy said we would make Bongo-Bongo, the sky was thick with scudding clouds, and as I leaned over the rail with Reilly I remarked,

"We'll have wet going, landing on the Chink, eh?"

"Yes. But a ducking will do us good," said he. "Ugh, my shirt sticks to my ribs like glue."

Just then a Rapa boy passed, then paused as though listening, his hideously decorated nose turned out to sea. In his perforated ears hung bits of shell and a clay pipe. Reilly reached out, gave the shell a tweak and exclaimed,

"What name you stop this fella listen, eh? You vamoose quick fella time or I knock seven bells out a' you plenty quick!"

The black moved on with a frightened roll of the blood-shot whites of his eyes.

"Don't like them blacks any better'n the white set we're with," growled Reilly.

I stole a glance at him.

"*Don't* you like them?" I asked.

"No, I don't. They try to be sociable, them Frenchies, but they're not built on sociable lines. Savoy himself isn't any better."

I glanced at the distant policeman. He was a tall man, lithe and slender, with a sharply defined aquiline nose, chin and mouth covered with black mustache and beard, and cheeks, as Reilly put it, "tanned clear to the bone." In spite of the fact that he continually wore a stiff helmet of Chinese

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make, he was as black as a Hindu. Around his waist was strapped a cartridge belt with two automatic holsters, one on each hip. In lieu of pants, he wore a breech-clout, while his feet were incased in sandals.

"He looks fierce enough," I admitted. "But I fancy you have to be, in the police-service here."

"LOOK here," Reilly said then. "Just what do you think of this proposition?"

I couldn't answer.

"I mean," he said, "just why do they always quit talking when we come up, and get so polite? There's something else in the wind besides this Chan Loo business."

"You mean——"

"After two looks at them, would you put it past them to attempt making away with all that money?"

"But Savoy belongs to the police!" I exclaimed.

"When did that word get to be the last in honesty?" he retorted.

I rubbed my lip, thinking.

"By George," I said, "maybe you're right. But pshaw, we'd better wait and see what turns up before we jump to conclusions."

"Just the same, I'm going to try to learn something. I notice they're pretty thick with those three Kanakas of the engine-crew. I can talk Kanaka, which they don't know. If I get a chance after supper, I'll see what I'll see."

We got some inkling of what was coming at supper. We messed with Savoy and his two henchmen; and that night they seemed more constrained than ever. They had a load on their chest, that was evident. Thinking perhaps I might start the ball rolling, I said to one of the Frenchmen,

"See here, Touché, what's the lay when we hit Bongo-Bongo? How are we going to go about this?"

He looked at Savoy for help. That individual gazed musingly at his fork a moment, then brought his eyes to bear on me. He was very suave and polite.

"Mr. Patten," said he, "we have been talking over a little matter among ourselves for the last few days, and the only reason we have not broached the subject before is that we thought perhaps our contemplated actions might not appeal to you and Mr. Reilly as compatible with the recognized ethics of police-procedure."

"Go ahead," I suggested. "Our hides are not made out of satin."

And then, as though he were not mentioning a word to conjure with, he said to me,

"Have you ever heard of the Silver Creese?"

I laughed a little. Who had not, in the South Pacific?

"Well," said he, just as calmly, "Chan Loo has the Creese!"

Was the man crazy or did I hear aright? Reilly turned his eyes to me with an expression half credulous, half mirthful in their depths.

"Man," said he, "do you know what you're talking about?"

"Yes," said the unruffled Savoy. "I am talking about the Silver Creese, which is now in the hands of Chan Loo."

I LOOKED hard at him. He appeared to be sure of his ground. And yet it was unbelievable. The Creese was a myth, a dream, a fairy-tale grown large in the telling. One might believe in it when drink changed the brain to that of a credulous anthropoid; but sober—you had your doubts.

As the story went, the Creese originated in the brain of a Mohammedan, who, never wholly sane as we see it, grew wholly mad in the Southern Seas while mourning for his son.

They tell of how Qudrat, Moro dato of blood and might, supposedly lost a son to the Spanish at Iligan, Mindanao; of how, grieving for that son, he and his warriors slaughtered Don Cortejo's Spanish regiment in the historic shadows of Death's Valley; of how, still grieving for that son, his fierce old Mohammedan brain twisted out of proportion until he turned against Allah himself.

Thereafter vengeance became a fetish with him. The sinking and looting of the Spanish steamer *Don Alfonso* off Zamboanga was one of his acts, and a source of keen satisfaction to the old fellow. But it was also a source of inspiration. The *Don Alfonso's* passengers were wealthy and partial to jewels, and also she carried an assortment of silver bars from the veins at Ilo-Ilo. So, leaving her flaming red on the night's black sea, Qudrat took the bars and the jewels ashore to his inland fastness, his monkey lips bared over his old black teeth,

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and the maggots of reprisal crawling deliciously through his warped old brain.

He praised his swordsmith, slapped him on the back. With bars and jewels and the finest ebony in Mindanao the old fellows evolved a creese whose like has never been heard of in the history of the Koran. Mohammed himself never wore such a weapon, even in the War of the Fosse. Its blade was of solid silver, its handle of purest ebony, both shining like *kouri*-bowls in a mosque. In the blade were set emeralds, great living diamonds and rubies whose hearts were as the flaring blood of centuries.

And so one night when the moon swung high over the eastern hills, and the tom-toms added to the stillness with their kettle-like boom, old Qudrat stole forth with the Silver Creese, and mounted the highest peak in that part of Mindanao, bent on coming hand to hand with Allah himself and thus avenging the death of his only son.

He never came back. To-day his bones lie bleaching among the clouds, the Mohammedans say. The Moros will not set foot on the peak. But men tell how, when the tale got around, a venturesome Englishman made the climb and found the Creese among the dew-washed bones. They say he was stabbed for it by a young Spanish officer in Iligan, who then eloped with a *mestizo* in a *banca* bound for Borneo. She in turn made way with him and was picked up with the Creese in a storm by a tramp steamer. They tell of how the crew got in a fight over the thing, and in the fight lost control of their ship, so that she went on the rocks of Mindoro Strait. Her white ribs lie there echoing the story to-day. And out of that mess, they say, some one escaped in a long boat—some one with the Silver Creese.

Since then many tales have been told of the Creese. When one squats under a gaudy tent amid the sandy dunes of the *igidi*, or sits round a camp-fire in the vampire dusk of the Land of the Morning Moon, such tales are good to hear; but for Savoy to mention it casually, and to state calmly that he knew where it was, was straining the point a bit.

"Look here, Savoy," I said, "maybe you can tell us too where Cogia Hassan Alhabbal's gold went to?"

"I am serious," he repeated, nettled a little. "I do not blame you for being incredulous. But the proposition is this—if you want to share in it. The Creese is, as you know, anybody's property. Now the money will be sent in to Sydney with those we capture. But the Creese—who need know anything about that? We share the proceeds alike."

"Share them among all that crew?" said Reilly, gripping my hand under the table.

"I guess not!" I cried, taking his cue.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Savoy. "They believe now." His companions laughed.

"No," he continued, "the crew will not come in. They are paid as deputies. We whites will divide it all."

AFTER a bit of haggling, we agreed, and as soon as we could Reilly and I got together on deck.

"Are they crazy, or are we all crazy, or what?" Reilly suddenly demanded of the air, of the hot night, of the vague distant shadows.

"They're blamed serious about it," I said musingly.

"You don't believe in it, do you?" he demanded.

"No-o," I said rather slowly.

He laughed.

"You're a-straddle the fence, like me."

He became serious again on the instant, and struck the rail a blow. First glancing to right and left, he said to me,

"*Tell* you what. None of that wa-wa went down my sluice way very far. You stay right here till I come back."

He was gone before I could answer, and I stood there waiting nervously, until, seven bells having struck in the second watch, he came out of the darkness and leaned beside me. I sensed right there he was as full of news as a balloon is of gas.

"Tell me," I said, gripping his arm in suppressed excitement equaling his own.

"We're in for a hot mess," he said; and I gasped as he told me the story.

He had slipped down against the bulkhead and overheard the six of them, Savoy, the two Frenchmen and the Kanaka engineers, laughing over the wool they had pulled over our eyes. Bongo-Bongo was a volcanic island, with an inland lagoon or harbor whose inlet was formed by the crumbled lip of the crater at one side, the inlet being so narrow that a fair-sized schooner would be forced to warp through. Since Chan Loo would be anchored in the

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lagoon, we were to anchor with cables across the mouth, and divide into two parties, one going to the east to mount the cliffs and shoot down into the Chink's schooner, the other party to attack a shack in which Chan Loo was living while his crew repaired his schooner, wrecked in a blow off Tahiti. And in a nutshell, their scheme was this:

Reilly and I were to take the five innocent Kanakas to the east and attack the schooner. In the meantime, Savoy, the two Frenchmen and two of the Kanaka engineers would stop on the west side, "get" Chan Loo, the money and the Silver Creese, and get back to where the Huahine mate, the doltish Rapa boys and one Kanaka were holding our schooner, and pull away, leaving us marooned to fight it out with the Chink's crew.

"Fine!" said I, fingering my automatic and looking very sweetly at the bridge. "*Very* fine scheme. Might have known there was something wrong when Savoy didn't mention how he *knew* Chan Loo had the Creese."

"Had a confederate with Chan Loo, he said," Reilly smiled. "Well, I wouldn't be surprised now if he were in cahoots with Chan Loo himself. What will we do?"

"Providing he carries it out as you overheard it, we'll do just as he says," said I, thinking fast. "That is, up to a certain point. We'll go ahead and start; then, when Savoy has gone, we'll put the Kanakas wise and one of us with two of them will drop back to the *Oahu Pearl* and give that Huahine mate and the rest the surprise of their lives. Do you get me?"

II

IT CAME about as he had foretold. We dropped quietly down on Bongo-Bongo along toward morning, and anchored with cables across the narrow inlet, each cable fastened to manacca palms at either end.

It was getting gray when the Rapa boys finished the job, and I could see the cliffs rising near us in the morning mist, and, just over the eastern rise, the shadowy tips of a schooner-masts. And when I saw that inlet and no pains taken to guard it, I was certain that Chan Loo was "in" with Savoy.

Ten to one Chan Loo was figuring on playing it low on his crew as Savoy intended doing with us.

"He's here," said Savoy, his black eyes burning. He proceeded to give us his directions. "Get into position right over there and commence shooting as soon as it gets daylight," he said.

So Reilly, myself and the five honest Kanaka boys went ashore off the bowsprit and pushed into the gloom of the manacca palms, while Savoy and the two Frenchmen went to the west.

In a minute we stopped, and I put it up to the Kanaka boys as quickly as possible. I didn't mention the Creese to them, but only the money. They were for going right back and cutting the hearts out of the muckers.

"No," I said, "two of you have got to keep up the bluff of shooting into these New Caledonians, and Reilly, you take two of the boys, and drop back to the *Oahu Pearl* and get those fellows. Get the drop on them first. I'm going across the lagoon."

"What's the need o' that?" Reilly expostulated.

"I'm going to get the Creese," I said, back over my shoulder.

He called low again to me to stop, but the whispering of the blue gods was in me that morning, and I wouldn't listen. I wrapped my belt and automatic around my head and pushed through to the lagoon.

I came to it sooner than I had expected. Instead of expanding out in the shape of an egg as I had thought, the inlet was at the southwest corner of the harbor. It shot in straight north, then turned to the east. The lagoon lay in the shape of a gourd whose neck had twisted at right angles.

The morning fog was heavy, and I couldn't see much, except occasionally a hazy glimpse of the Chink's schooner through occasional rifts to my right. Then straight across I got a momentary glimpse of the shack Savoy had described. Clad only in breech-clout and sandals, I took off the shoes, tied them around my neck and went into the water.

It wasn't far across. I made it with the crawl-stroke like a top. If the fog did bother me some, it also hid me from the silent schooner, and I reached the other side without hearing a sound.

Going up the hillside was a sight worse than the swim. I needed that afterglow, I tell you, when I tackled that climb among

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the wet rocks and verdure. Too, it was so unearthly still and ghostlike; and my nerves were drawing tighter than gut cords, expecting each minute to have some one leap over that cliff and pink me through the head before I could pull trigger. But I reached the top with no mishap and peeked out from behind a boulder with my heart pounding up in my mouth.

There, not fifty feet from me, was a nipa shack. Not a breath of sound came from it. It stood there gloomy and quiet in that ungodly stillness like some old monastery far above the world, mysterious and clammy in that morning gray. It was lonelier, that spot was, than hot noon in the desert, when the palm-trees stand dead and motionless against the heavens and the distant mountain-ranges lie asleep with the mummies in the sands.

Where was Savoy? Where was Chan Loo? There was no entrance or window on my side, and I could not see into the shack. But, realizing that I had no time to waste, I slipped on my sandals, and started on a light-footed run for the dwelling.

As I did so, shots sounded across the harbor, sounding like the spanking of pans under a blanket as they came to me through the thinning fog. But still no sound from the shack. I peered cautiously round one side, saw a door swinging ajar and crept up to it, my gun ready in my hand. For caution's sake, I peered round the door, saw nothing, then leaped into the doorway, ready to shoot at once.

But this was unnecessary. On the floor lay a big white man, slack in a puddle of blood. He had been stabbed in the back.

I ran to him and turned him over. As I did so, I shook him hard.

"Where are Chan Loo and Savoy?" I yelled at him.

His eyes opened vacuously, and I was forced to shake him again.

"Where is Chan Loo?" I yelled again.

"Here," he whispered. He even attempted a wry smile. "Great—alias—eh? Well—they—got me."

"Who? Who got you?" I asked, in too much of a hurry to be surprised.

His face worked, foam came on his lips, and he cursed thickly.

"My partner—Savoy!" he whispered.

So Savoy had double-crossed Chan Loo, too!

"Once more," I yelled at him, "is there anything to this Silver Creese story?"

He tried hard to answer. A great light came into his eyes. The effort seemed too much, and he sank back, inert. And just then I heard a crashing of bushes off in the distance, and I dropped him, cursing myself for the moments I had lost.

I RACED out of the door and down a path from which the sound came. Down this I panted and stumbled, noticing as I ran that here and there lay a gold coin, dropped as though from a hole in a sack or pocket. I did not pause to pick them up. They were telltale chips in a game of hare and hound, and I knew Savoy to be ahead of me, running for the *Oahu Pearl*.

As I ran, the crescendo of shots increased below me, and this disturbance, coming so sharply at variance with the former tomblike quiet, set the palm-groves awhir with the swish of frightened wings. The sun was just shoving its copper rim above the horizon, and through the mists, rising like wraiths from another world, monkeys screamed, birds chattered and cawed and the whole island awoke to an inferno of sound. Once a fear-blind goat dashed between my legs and threw me down a precipitate pile of boulders in bench-like array. I slid into a puddle at the bottom, but was up and going the next instant.

I was running my best when suddenly I broke through the palms on the very edge of a deep chasm. I was forced to grab at a bush to keep from sliding over.

What caused that chasm is more than I know. The crater proper of the volcano was the harbor, as I have said, yet this fissure was here to the west of the harbor and, almost one hundred feet down, a lake of water boiled hotter than the fires of inferno. The stench of it came up against my face with a musty, mineral, unpleasant smell.

In width the fissure appeared to be over a hundred feet. Across it stretched a rope bridge, the two top strands fastened to tree-trunks and not only acting as hand-holds but serving for the suspension of the foot-board lace-work as well. And, looking across the chasm, I let out a curse as I saw Savoy just leaving the other end.

On his shoulder was a heavy sack, while ahead of him the two Frenchmen shoved the form of a woman whose hands were tied

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behind her, and whose back was weighted with a heavy sheath. Evidently it was a bolo or creese—the handle, unusually brilliant, shone bright and clear above the mahogany scabbard; a wonderful piece of carving of purest ebony, that hilt.

You ask me why I didn't go back and leave him to run into the hands of Reilly and the five Kanakas? Why did the Moslems storm at the inoffensive monastery of Mar Saba for centuries?

When I saw it, I thought of how I had sat high up on Maol one day and looked down at the dreamy canyon of the Lenamon and the sleepy harbor of Iligan where the brass-cannoned galleons used to ride at anchor long ago; and I thought, looking at Death's Valley, of how turbaned old Qudrat had sat and screamed above the echoes of the crashing bolos and bayonets while his warriors made heroes of Don Cortijo's regiment. I thought of it again this morning. There rose up before me the picture of twisted old Qudrat going up the Holy Mountain with the Silver Creese tight in his hand, while the blood-red, sad-faced moon looked down. And its madness got into my blood. I let out another curse and jumped on the bridge.

As I leaped, one of the Frenchmen yelled, dropped the woman's arm, raised his rifle and fired. The shot took me a murdering blow in the side of my right leg. Staggering, I raised my pistol to return the shot. When I fired, another slug from Savoy's pistol whipped overhead. Mine dropped the Frenchman in his tracks.

But in firing I had to let go of the rope with my right hand, so that my movement set the structure swaying. When I grabbed at the rope to save myself, calling on all the gods of Samarcand the while, Savoy's poisonously bloated face contorted into a hellish grin. He grabbed at the woman and yelled at the other Frenchman. Swinging the woman in front of him, Savoy now sought to back away into the trees. He laughed loud as I raised my pistol to cover him, then lowered it away from the woman.

For, by the *klong-yai* of the Siamese, it was the woman of Leeano-Lenee! The woman with the deep-colored eyes of life! I had dreamed of that woman under the *torii* gates,while listening to the sob of a hula off Lavanga, and at noon in the desert with the far-off ranges dozing in the sun.

As I saw her face turned toward me over that rounded shoulder, my heart gave a flop like that of a Jewish mother who sees her boy under a Cossack knife, and I forgot the pain in my leg and yelled like a dervish to be at them.

BUT in the instant it had taken me to aim at Savoy, that second Frenchman had jumped over his fallen companion and behind the tree to which one of the strands was tied. I saw his arm come round the trunk, and in his hand was a heavy machete. I did a deal of furious thinking as I saw him commence hacking at the rope.

By the holy Banshees but my thoughts worked fast! Below me was a boiling death that made me literally seasick. Before me was death again from Savoy's pistol. The rising sun-rays made of the barrel's end a shining circle around a deadly black hole, while behind it that black-bearded face twisted into a mask more hellish to my strained senses than the crime-stamped masks of the medieval Huns. My blood seemed to turn to water. My mind revolved like a gymnast, and I shrieked in incontrollable fear.

True, he had blundered as well as protected himself in using her for a shield, for she fought bitterly to turn, butting with her head and striking with her knees, and thus disconcerted his aim. But it would take only one shot to down me when I came nearer. And I would have to travel slowly on that bridge, too, as it swung so readily.

One redeeming feature alone presented itself. Chan Loo, or whoever constructed the affair, had wrapped the ropes with wire for a space of five feet or so in order to protect them against animals seeking to sharpen their teeth. There was a chance that it might hold out against the knife until I reached the brink, and so, chancing it, I lunged ahead.

I had taken but two steps when a sharp crack preceded the sag of the foot-board. My pistol dropped from my hand into the water below. The skin ripped on my forearms as I seized the other rope and hung there gasping, striving to raise myself to bear my weight on my leg and chest. Dried ashes blotted out the saliva in my mouth. My heart went thick and sluggish and painful, then sought to break my chest with a wild protesting throb.

Red specks filmed and danced before my

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eyes and I prayed for something to hit me in the head before I struck that water. I ducked my head and frantically brushed the sweat from my eyes; and then I saw the Frenchman jump for his rifle.

But right there the woman turned the tables. During her struggles I had dimly noted her hands twisting at the cords. Suddenly she went free. More than free, for, as Savoy sought to fire again, she whirled him, thrust one leg behind him and shoved violently. It threw him, stumbling, against the tree. Striking it, he sought to hold himself with one arm, but the weight of the sack that hung by a belt to his shoulder served to add to the impetus of his fall, and he slipped, falling over the edge.

He let out a mighty yell and grabbed the rope with both hands.

Then the girl ran into the forest.

The sudden relief went to my head. Mark me, it did! I laughed at Savoy's curses—laughed as I saw the Frenchman, who had been stooping for his rifle, now run to Savoy's aid. But the laugh was close to tears when I saw Savoy dragged to safety, and both, without another glance at me, run after the woman into the trees.

I must have gone a little dippy then. I started to crawl in a haze. Suspended thus on that teetery line with that sore leg, I was hard put to it to sustain my balance and shove along on my breast toward the brink. My lungs seemed afire. My head got to floating around in a queer circle till it made me laugh. I thought I heard a shot, but was not sure. The next thing I knew hands were helping me up; and then for a time things got very dizzy.

It was Reilly who shoved a flask against my lips.

"Wow!" he said. "Take a drink of this. You're some tight-rope walker."

"I couldn't wait," he explained as I drank. "I left two of the Kanakas over Chan Loo's schooner, and got the drop on the *Oahu Pearl* with no trouble at all. We've got the crew tied back there now."

"Did you get Savoy?" I asked.

"Both of 'em. Savoy cashed and that Frenchman is pretty bad hurt."

"Did you see a woman?" I queried now.

"Nary a woman, boy."

I stood up, rather shaky, and with him moved off toward the spot where he had met Savoy. On the way I caught a glimpse of waters through a gap in the trees, and halted.

"WHY, that isn't the harbor!" I ejaculated. "That's a strip of water between this and another island! And say——" I broke off and ran down to the shore, for, near the opposite bank, I saw a swimming form, with, near the head, something black flashing oddly in the sun.

"What is it?" cried Reilly. Then he saw.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, and looked at me queerly.

It was the woman. She was too far to make out her features, but as she gained the bank, and rose, she faced us, drew something from the scabbard and waved it high above her head.

"The Creese!" gasped Reilly. "Or am I dreaming?"

Dreaming or not, the thing she waved flung back the morning sun in a thousand rays. Dazed and wondering, I passed my hands across my eyes and stared as one transfixed. By the mosque of Hasan, could that be the Creese with which old Qudrat stole forth one night when the moon swung high over the eastern hills and the tom-toms, booming softly, echoed with a note no one had heard from tom-toms before?

All the mystery of the time-hoary Moro legends struck me again like a blow. Could this be the blade whose name they used? Its blade was of solid silver, they said, and the handle of purest ebony, both shining like *kouri*-bowls in a mosque. In the blade, they said, were set emeralds, great living diamonds, and rubies whose hearts shone like the sparkling coral deep down in the sacred lake of the Ashantis. Could that be the blade then?

It was too far to see the settings from where we stood, yet jewels there were in that blade, for their crackling flames danced and flashed and gleamed before us like the lights in a glass prism held to a rainbow.

It put a clamp on our muscles, the sight of it did.

She stood a moment so; and then she was gone. A moment before I had been on the point of exhaustion. I forgot my wounded leg, forgot all but that Creese, became a new man on the spot.

"Go back to the schooner!" I cried. "I'm going to get her. I'll be back."

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I was into the water before I ended, and swimming as I never swam before for the other bank. My body was half out of the water most of the time on the trip across, for I sped with eager leaps. My wounds? Yes, they hurt, as the salt bit into them, but I only cursed and swam the faster.

When I reached the other side, I ran up and into the trees in search of her.

I came upon her on the beach just around the bend from where she had come ashore. Evidently she had been waiting for me. She had time to escape, for she was in a *proa* with three black Gooma boys lying on their paddles and keeping some distance from shore.

"Where is it?" I cried. I must have appeared like a mad dog in my eagerness.

She only smiled and looked at me. I plunged eagerly into the water to come aboard. But she had the boys paddle out farther, and I saw that was useless.

"What is it you wish?" she asked me.

"The Creese!" I yelled. "What else would I wish?"

"Is—that—all?" she asked, slowly.

Suddenly I saw. I was not to have the Creese without her. How could I help but see with that light in her eyes? Oh, *what* a woman she was! I can see her yet. She was the beating of the *klong-yai*, the sob of the *hula*, the notes of the surf-boom, the whisper of the Spring breezes that come in over the sea from the far-off Nile and put their pulling fingers round your heart. By the fez of a Moslem, yes! She was of the stuff that made Antony throw Rome away. I leaned toward her—I thought of those lips that would draw the heart of me clear out of my breast——

And then I thought of the photo back there on the *Oahu Pearl!* Now, *why* did I think of that? *Why are we civilized?* Why should I have cared that she was Polynesian and not of my color? But somehow the madness left me and I dropped my eyes from hers. Yes, it drove the madness from me; but—not the longing! I ran away from her, and I am not ashamed to say that I ran very fast. I had to! She called to me once in a voice that made me think of Egypt and the soft low notes of some tribesman's lute under the Pyramids; but I plunged into the water and swam back to Reilly faster than I had come over.

To this day, even when I think of the picture of that American girl in a swirl of lace and furs, I am not sure that I did right. She was—but you wouldn't understand that. What do you fellows who ride in elevators know of women?

We made the back trip in good time, leaving the dead to the trees and the sweep of the breeze. What was left of the money we turned in at Sydney. Also the wounded Frenchmen, the three Kanaka engineers and Chan Loo's convict crew. We got commissions on the force on the strength of it. Reilly is there yet. But we never told any one about the Creese. It isn't comfortable to be called a liar.

THAT, then, is my story. Interblended with it are the nodding boughs of the old, old palms and the throbbing note of the surf-boom, which, coming softly, resemble the sob of a hula across a moonlit lagoon. It is only one of the tales of this wondrous blade, yet, like the rest, moonlight goes with it, and madness, and the mystic film of hot Southern Seas and tangled islands. At mention of it the Mohammedans say the houris of the seventh heaven shake their heads in sorrow, while I, when *I* think of it, remember always a girl whose eyes had the deep color one sees in blue-green grottoes far down in a cool green tropical bay.

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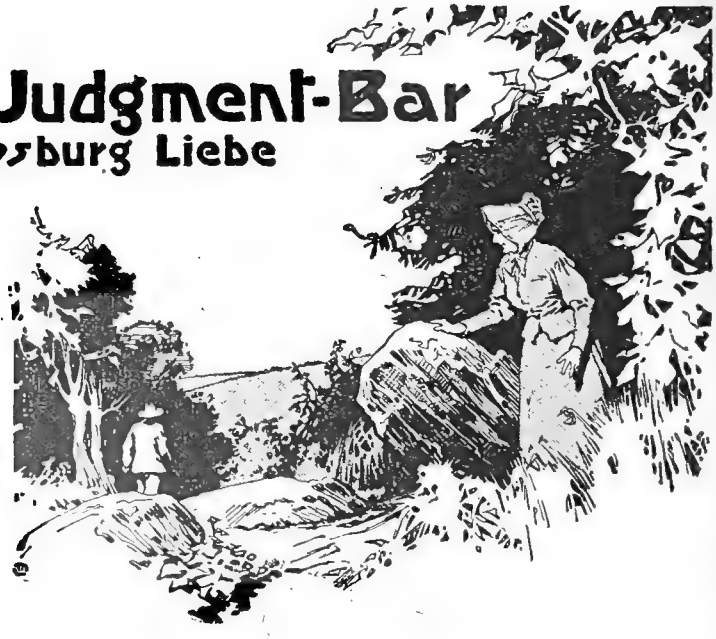
The Judgment-Bar

by Hapsburg Liebe



BELDEN stood with his gray old host on the comb of Ivy Mountain. To the darkening east stretched a sea of foot-hills, which ran quickly from a soft blue into the black edge of the coming night. To the west the dying sun was burning a hole low in the fringe of cool, green pines that surmounted the crest of the majestic Big Blackfern. The wild, sweet scent of the woods was everywhere, everywhere. The silence was that of nature's holy of holies.

Then Grandpap Morrison turned his kindly old eyes toward his guest and spoke, interrupting Belden's train of thought.

"Look away acrost thar, jest under the sun," he said. "Do you see, on the side o' the Blackfern, a stone chimbley a-standin' at one end of a pile o' logs? Yes. Well, one o' my best friends used to live thar; him and his wife. They've done gone on afore. His name was Saxton Bowers—but I reckon I'd better wait until after supper, Mr. Belden, acause it's mighty nigh night now, and by the time we git back to my cabin my wife she'll be uneasy about us'"

They walked along the comb of the mountain for a little way, turned down and entered a trail that led home.

After the evening meal, when they were sitting in chairs just outside the doorway, Grandpap Morrison told Belden this:

HIS name was Saxton Bowers, and his good wife's name was Josephine. Sack, as we called him for short, was a powerful man in his best days, a great, bearded giant of a feller; and even when he was seventy, he walked fourteen miles in one twenty-four hours. His wife was one o' these fine, motherly women, edzactly the kind o' timber that angels is made out of.

They had one son, whose name was Rame. He was as big and strappin' as his pap, and he didn't see no harm in a-makin' whisky out o' corn that he'd growed hisself, and on a still his own money had bought. He died at twenty-five, a single man. He was killed down thar at the store in the valley by old Melvin Blair, a revenue-officer. Blair had heerd that Rame was a bad one, which wasn't altogether so, and he worked a trick on him. He run up to Rame, and said thar was a mad dog out in the road, and axed to borry Rame's gun quick. Rame he handed over the rifle afore he thought, and the officer turned it on him and ordered him to throw up his hands.

Instid o' throwin' up his hands, Rame grabbed a gun from a bystander.

They buried him in the little churchyard

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down thar in the valley; and after it was all over, Sack Bowers got down on his knees on the fresh earth and swore that he'd kill Melvin Blair. Then Sack he went back home and made a rough tombstone out o' mountain slate. He chiseled acrost the top "Here Sleeps Rame Bowers;" and acrost the bottom he chiseled "Murdered By Melvin Blair."

Time dragged on and on after it happened, and still Sack hadn't made no attempt to keep his oath. Him and his wife lived like hermits in their cabin over on the Blackfern, a-bearin' their sufferin' in silence. People begun to say Sack wasn't a-goin' to keep his oath; but I believed he would. You see, the religion o' the dead and gone Bowerses was "Keep yore word and pay your debts." I knowed that Sack was a-waitin' for some reason—which he was. The truth was that he wanted to put it off as long as he could acause he knowed he'd be caught when he done it, and he wanted the law to git only the last years of his life. And then I reckon he thought Melvin Blair was a-dreadin' him, and wanted him to suffer as much as possible.

And one day when Rame had been dead four years the public found out for shore that Sack hadn't forgot. One o' Sack's best friends, Jim Marberry, mentioned Melvin Blair's name to Sack—and Sack he hit that thar good friend o' his like the kick of a mule, a-knockin' him about thirty foot down the hill.

After that nobody ever dar'd to say "Melvin Blair" to Sack Bowers.

TEN years had passed sence pore Rame had went. It was a fine mornin' in early Summer, and the woods was all white with dogwood blooms. The vi'lets and puccoons was all a-stickin' their little blossoms up in the damp and shady places. Squirrels was jest a-rantin' in the green trees, and yaller-hammers was a-makin' love everywhar. Sack Bowers told hisself that he was a-gittin' old, and that if he was a-goin' to keep his oath it was time he was up and at it. You see, it had long been Sack's braggin'-p'int that he could jump the creek below at any place; and he had tried it that mornin' and fell in.

As he went back towards the cabin, with his drippin' clo'es a-leavin' a trail o' little water-puddles ahind of him, he begun to re'lize his age more and more. He lifted his beard on the back o' one hand, and looked at it. It was plumb white. The hand he lifted it with was ga'nt and palsied. Yes, it was shore time he was a-keepin' his oath.

He stopped at the fence aside o' the gate, his head down, a-thinkin'. Age had slipped up ahind of him, like a thief. He was afeard he had waited too long, afeard he couldn't stand the trip to the valley and all. And then old Josephine come a-hobblin' down atween the rows o' bloomin' touch-me-nots and buddin' marygolds.

"Sack," she says to him, "my ears is mighty nigh a-burnin' up, I wisht I may die if they hain't! I'm shore somebody's been a-talkin' about us. I've done throwed salt in the fire."

Which, a-throwin' salt in the fire, is supposed to give the slanderer the toothache for punishment. Pore old Josephine she was powerful to believe in signs and sech things.

Sack he smiles a little. He lays his arms on the fence, laces his fingers together and commences a-twiddlin' of his thumbs—which was a habit o' his, this here twiddlin' of his thumbs. It had always sort o' tickled him to hear his wife talk about signs. I reckon it was about the only fun he had. Then his face grows serious ag'in.

"Josephine," says he, "I'm a-gittin' old. I'm a-breakin', as shore as you ain't a yaller-jacket. I jest tried to jump the creek down thar, and if I didn't fall in thar hain't no devil! If I'm a-goin' to fix matters with Melvin Blair, it's time I was at it. He's a-gittin' old too, and he's li'ble to drap off 'most any time. I'm a-goin' to start for his house down in Happy Valley as soon as I can git dry clo'es on. You find me a fresh hankercher, Josephine, and do me up a little bite o' grub to take along. Them's long miles, and I'm shore to git hongry afore I git thar."

"Sack, honey," says Josephine, "I'm afeard a-gittin' wet'll make you sick."

"Sick nothin'!" snorts Sack. "You jest *will* treat me like a baby, spite o' everything!"

Josephine turned sad-like toward the cabin. She didn't say nothin' to her husband to try to persuade him out o' goin' down to kill Melvin Blair; she had spent several years a-tryin' to do that, and it seemed about the most useless thing in the world. Sack he was sech a good man, all

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but that. It used to be a common thing to hear him say "Give to the pore, always," when somebody'd tell him he was too free-hearted for his own good. "Give to the pore, always—" and him one o' the porest men in the whole section!

Well Sack, he changed clo'es, a-puttin' on a' old patched coat, a shirt made out o' so many kinds o' cloth that it was hard to tell which was the shirt itself, and a pair o' jeans trousers. He had to wear the same boots and the same hat, for they was all he had. Then he took up his old cap-and-ball pistol, stood in the doorway and fired all six rounds at a spot on the gate-post. It shore pleased him to see that he hadn't missed the post, even if he hadn't hit the mark but twict.

He reloaded the old pistol, and hid it in a back pocket. His wife handed him his bite o' grub tied up in a bit o' clean white rag, and he poked it into his coat-pocket. Then he put both arms around his old wife Josephine.

"Good-by, Josephine," he says, "good-by, honey. You've always been a good wife. If I never see you no more—and I reckon I hain't apt to, unless it's with me ahind o' the bars—always remember that I loved you better'n anything on earth. And it won't be long until you jine me. Not long. Not long, honey. Good-by, good-by."

"Sack," pleads old Josephine onct more, "don't do that. Take the murder out o' yore heart. I hain't a-keerin' nothin' about Melvin Blair. All I want is for you to take the murder out o' yore heart! You're too old, Sack—you're too clost to the Jedgment-Bar o' the Almighty to harbor murder in yore heart. Sack, hain't you read in the Scriptures a thousand times whar it says 'Thou shalt not kill'?"

"I never look at that page," says Sack, a-shakin' his white head. "I read all the rest, but I never look at that page. Josephine, honey, you know that no man o' my name ever failed to keep his word and pay his debts. I'm the last o' the Bowerses, and I shore hain't a-goin' to disgrace all the rest. Yes sirree, Josephine, I'm shore a-goin' to call Melvin Blair out and shoot him the same as I would shoot a pizen copperhead-snake; and as he dies I'm a-goin' to tell him I hope his sperit'll land in the middle o' the deepest place in torment. Yes sirree, and as he gits his last breath I'll ax him if he can begin to smell the brimstone! Good-by."

HE TOOK up his cane, jerked the front rim o' his black slouch hat down low and started. But as he went down the path atween the buddin' marygolds and bloomin' touch-me-nots he throwed the cane down, a-tryin' to make hisself believe that he was too strong to carry that badge of old age.

And although he walked sort o' blind-like in spite o' hisself, the old woman who set all crumpled in a heap in the doorway never noticed it—acause she was somewhat blind herself.

Josephine, she was hurt mighty nigh to death at him a-leavin' her. To git at the bottom of it' she was tore up as bad over the fact that Sack was willin' to give her up for the sake o' the religion o' the dead and gone Bowerses as she was over the fact that Sack had murder in his heart. Yes, Sack was willin' to give her up after—le's see, about forty-five years—forty-five years spent together, with hardly a day or a night apart! And as she set thar in the doorway, pore old soul, a-listenin' to the dyin' sound o' Sack's footsteps, all o' that thar forty-five years, and a little more, drifted back to her. It's so easy for old folks to live in the past, anyhow.

Onct more she seen Sack when he used to come to call on her, a big, strappin' feller with flashin' eyes and a fightin'-jaw—and yit, for all o' his bigness, he was that bashful that he always turned red when he spoke to her. She remembered the night he axed her, a word at a time, to jine her life with his. She remembered the scent o' the sweet old-fashioned flowers in her mother's little yard; she remembered the silence atween his axin' and her answerin'; she remembered the great, yaller moon that hung high over the neighborin' mountain and made the whole blessed world a world of gold——

And she remembered when the baby, pore Rame, had come, and how they had both cried about the newness and the sweet strangeness of it; and she remembered how hard Sack had worked acause they had somebody asides theirselves. She could hear him sing his mountain songs as he cut the trees for tan-bark, and worked in the ground for corn and planted trees for apples. She could hear the banjo-strings a-tinklin'

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under the sweep of his strong fingers as he set 'afore the fire and played for the baby while she washed the dishes. All o' them days trooped a-past her, like soldiers afore a general. She seen 'em as plain as when she'd lived 'em instid o' dreamin' 'em.

And then when somebody had come and told 'em about pore Rame——

She set up straight with a sob. She jest couldn't go no fu'ther with it. Asides, thar was the sound o' footsteps a-comin' up atween the rows o' bloomin' touch-me-nots and buddin' marygolds. She wiped her eyes and looked, a-hopin' it was Sack with all her heart. And it was. Sack had forgot to kiss her good-by. He wasn't much o' the kissin' kind, and what with the great thing he had on his mind he hadn't thought of it when he'd set out a few minutes afore.

"Sack!" cries the old woman, a-gittin' to her feet and a-goin' down to meet him, "Sack!"

Sack he kissed her three times on the mouth, and then turned back.

"Why," says Josephine, "I was in hopes that you—I thought maybe——"

Sack he stops and faces her, with his head held high.

"I'm a Bowers," says he. "Us Bowerses always keeps our word and pays our debts. We ain't but human, like we was made. I reckon I oughtn't to hate—but then it's human to hate."

"That word—human," Josephine says back, "hides so many sins. Sack, I told you afore that you're too clost to the Jedgment-Bar o' the Almighty to harbor murder in yore old heart."

"But I've done swore," says Sack.

He starts off ag'in, with his head as high and his shoulders as straight as they ever was in his life. He soon hits the path that leads to the creek below and then follers it out o' the mountains and into Happy Valley. But afore he gits far away he stops and hollers to his wife:

"And now don't you foller me, Josephine! Good-by!"

"Good-by, good-by," says pore old Josephine.

She watched him stalk down the windin' trail, a-breshin' his way through the lorrels that growed thick on each side. And as his whole figger was swallered up in the green branches a little fu'ther on, it seemed to her like a-seein' him buried. She knowed right then that she was a-goin' to foller him. She knowed that nothin' couldn't keep her from it. I reckon if it had 'a' been the grave that had took him from her, she'd 'a' went down into it jest the same to be with him.

I tell you the world don't reco'nize the heroes we've got all around us in these here long-sufferin', faithful women who always has to carry the gallin' crosses o' the men-folks's makin'.

Josephine she hobbles into the house.

"I know I shore promised to love, and honor, and obey him," she says to the awful stillness o' the old home cabin. "I've always done all three up to this day. But I'm a-goin' to disobey him now—I'm shore a-goin' to be with him down thar. I don't know what might happen to him. I'll try to foller him and him not see me—until he needs me, and then I'll let him see me."

SHE didn't have many clo'es to change, pore old thing. She put on her dark-gray dress and her dark-gray bonnet—both made out o' the same kind o' cloth—shet the door and started down atween the bloomin' touch-me-nots and buddin' marygolds; and as she went she picked up Sack's cane, which he'd scorned to carry, and walked with it. It seemed so much a part o' him, that old cane.

But she was overanxious, and she walked too fast. She come up on her husband about a mile down the creek. Sack he had stopped and was a-lookin' at a sassy little boomer-squirrel that had run down on a low-hangin' hick'ry limb and was a-barkin' at him. The squirrel was re'lly a-makin' a noise somethin' like the quackin' of a duck; but to old Sack it was a-sayin':

"Jedgment-Barl Jedgment-Barl"

For Sack wasn't a young man, and he didn't have a young man's mind—although I reckon his mind wasn't no wuss'n the mind of any other old man when it carries a' awful burden. The truth o' the matter was that Sack was a-havin' a wrastle with his conscience. But he throwed his conscience down and choked it with the fact that he was a Bowers and tharfore must pay his debts and keep his word. No, he jest couldn't disgrace them who had gone on afore.

"Shet up, you little sassy varmint, you!" says Sack to the squirrel. "If I had a plenty o' am'nition, I'd show you how to

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mock me, you dad-blasted, sassy rascal——"

And then he caught sight o' Josephine a-peepin' around a clump o' lorrels. But he didn't seem to be so very mad. I reckon thar was somethin' mighty comfortin' about her wrinkled face and motherly eyes. He laced his fingers together in front and commenced his old habit o' twiddlin' his thumbs over and over.

"Josephine, honey," he says, "I thought I told you not to foller."

"I—I hain't a-follerin' you," stammers his wife, a-pullin' her dark-gray bonnet down to keep from a-lookin' at him—acause that lie shore had to tear its way out o' her good old soul. "I seen a star shoot last night, and that's a shore sign that thar is somebody sick in this here neighborhood. It fell in the direction of Sallie Akers's house. If you don't keer, Sack, honey, I'll go along down thar as you go to the valley."

"Shore," smiles Sack, "shore. Come along. I heerd a tree-frog holler a few minutes ago," he says, a-tryin' to be funny and keep her from a-thinkin' too much about what he was a-goin' to do. "Is thar any sign in a tree-frog a-hollerin', Josephine?"

"Why, Sack," replies Josephine, "it's a shore sign o' rain, o' course! And you'd better give out a-goin' to the valley, acause you'll git wet afore you git thar."

"Git wet nothin'!" roars Sack—but he stoops and kisses his wife as a sort of a' apology. "What difference does it make if I do git wet, Josephine?" he axes. "Hain't I on my last journey in this here vale o' tears anyhow?"

"But—the Jedgment-Bar!" says Josephine, a-shakin' her head mighty sad-like and a-tappin' the ground with the cane she was a-carryin'.

Jest then a yaller-hammer run out on a bendin' oak and commenced a-goin' "Aweeker! Aweeker! Aweeker!"

But to Sack Bowers's old mind it repeated the words his wife had said last.

"Aw, you shet up!" says Sack, a-shakin' his fist at the bird. "If I had a plenty o' am'nition, you dad-blasted——"

He struck off down the trail, a-goin' as fast as he could walk. Maybe he wanted to git out o' the sound o' the yaller-hammer's mockin'—I reckon so. When they had reached a p'int clost to Sallie Akers's cabin, he stopped and turned to his wife, who had had a hard time a-keepin' up with him and showed it in her pantin'.

"Good-by, Josephine, honey," he says. "Good-by onct more."

"Sack, honey," pleads the old woman, "please don't go. Stay with me. It'll be so lonesome without you away back here in these hills. Everything'll make me think o' you. Everywhar I turn thar'll be somethin' that seems to be a part o' you. I'll see the trees you planted, and the spring you walled up, and the furnicher you made. I'll see the bloomin' touch-me-nots and the buddin' marygolds we both set out together in the yard. Sack, take that murder out o' yore heart!"

"My name's Bowers," says Sack.

"But maybe Melvin Blair he ain't as mean as you think," Josephine she goes on. "I hain't a-upholdin' him in his killin' of our boy; it may be that as he seen it he was sort o' jestified."

"Yes," snaps Sack, a-turnin' away, "he *is* mean, too. He's mean enough to feed his children salty grub and then sell 'em water. He's as mean as gyarbroth. He's so pizen mean that the Old Scratch hisself is jealous of him. Good-by for the last time."

He stalks off down the path which led to the valley. Thar is a chanct that he was afeared to trust hisself with his old life-pardner any longer; that he was afeard he'd backslide in the religion o' the dead and gone Bowerses.

O' COURSE Josephine she never stopped in to see Sallie Akers. After Sack had got some little distance down the trail, she set into follerin' him ag'in. And she was more keerful about a-catchin' up with him this time. She always peeped sly-like around the bends in the path instid o' bustin' around 'em keerless. But onct she got so clost to her husband that she heerd him holler at a yaller-hammer.

Sack he seemed a good deal relieved when he had got out o' the mountains, whar thar wasn't no trees for the squirrels and birds to set in and tell him things. He seemed to go with a lighter step when the path took him into a level field with growin' corn in it which reached almost to his shoulders. His wife she lagged ahind of him a little fu'ther, a-takin' all pains that he didn't see her. She'd keep her eyes

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always on him as he plodded along, and she was always ready to dodge down out o' sight in the green corn in case he was to turn his white head. And she noticed that Sack hadn't et his grub yit.

The old Blair home was a big white farm-house, set about two miles from the edge o' the mountains. Thar was big elm and oak trees all around it, and a double row o' elms run down the front walk and to the road. It was late in the afternoon when old Sack Bowers drawed up afore the gate. And still Sack hadn't et his bite o' grub.

He was powerful tired, and it seemed like his old legs wouldn't hardly support his body. He almost wished that he'd brought his cane along. And as he was afeared he'd git weak or somethin' durin' the carryin' out o' the thing he was determined on doin', he decided that he'd set down on the uppin'-block aside o' the gate and rest for a little spell.

He thought of his grub; but somehow he didn't want it.

He set thar for about five minutes. Josephine was a-watchin' him from her place ahind of a' apple-tree about fifty yards up the road. She thought she seen him sneak the old cap-and-ball pistol out o' his pocket and examine it. She was right about that. He did look to the loads in the pistol, for he didn't want to make a misfire of it. Then he gits to his feet and moves toward the gate.

Somehow his heart got into his throat as he raised the latch and was about to step inside o' the yard. He couldn't keep from a-thinkin' about Josephine. Her old face was afore him jest as he'd seen it last, a-pleadin' with him to take the murder out o' his heart.

Then the whole scene faded, and instid o' the elms and the oaks and the big white house thar was a cabin in the mountains. Josephine was a-standin' at the gate a-watchin' for him—and ready to run as soon as he come in sight. But he slipped up ahind of her, and took her by the arm, and led her to the vine-hung porch, whar he axed her a word at a time to jine her life with his. He remembered the scent o' the sweet old-fashioned flowers; he remembered the great bright moon that hung high over the neighborin' mountain and made the whole blessed world a world of gold——

And after they was married, how hard pore Josephine had worked to make him a happy man! He had watched her take the roses out o' her cheeks and give 'em to him and the baby, a-smilin'—always a-smilin'—as she done it. And durin' the thin years, he remembered she'd tried to pertend that she'd done eat, that he might be shore to git enough. And she still loved him that-away, only more. Her heart was wrapped around his like a vine around a tree—and thar was murder in his heart!

"But I've got my word to keep, my debt to pay," he says to his weakenin' self, and begins to walk slow like towards the front door of the big white house.

But jest then thar come the sound of a yaller-hammer's love-makin' from the elms overhead—"Aweeker! Aweeker! Aweeker!"

Sack stopped dead still.

From deep down in him somewhar thar come a little voice which says to him:

"Sack Bowers," it says, "you owe that good wife o' yores a thousand times bigger debt than you owe Melvin Blair, or the religion of yore dead and gone people. And if you do what you're set on a-doin', you're shore a-goin' to break yore word to God Almighty, which you've give several times sence you give it to the preacher who married you forty-five years ago—acause you *have* prayed a little, low-down and mean as you are, you dad-blasted, old hard-headed scound'el, you!"

SACK was already at the Jedgment-Bar—the Jedgment-Bar of his own soul. It stretched atween him and the big white house, and he couldn't cross it. And then Sack Bowers tore all o' the murder out o' his heart, faced around and went towards the gate.

He went slow-like out into the road, and turned his weary steps in the direction o' the pale city o' them who was a-sleepin' their last sleep under the soft Tennessee skies. He never knowed what took him thar, I reckon—or couldn't tell, if he did.

And pore Josephine, a-rejoicin' in her heart of hearts, follered him. She wanted to catch up with him now; but she couldn't. She didn't have the strength to walk any faster'n he was a-walkin', and she felt like she couldn't holler in that sacred stillness.

Sack pulled off his old slouch hat when he got to the iron fence that shet in the pale city, a-lettin' the fadin' sunlight glisten in his white ha'r. He wiped at his eyes, and went a-walkin' slow-like out into the

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grounds, whar the scent o' roses and jasmine come to him and seemed to be the breath o' flowers from the Beyond.

He was a-s'archin' for a' old slab o' slate-stone, and he couldn't help but wonder if thar would be flowers planted thar too, the same as was on the rest—and then he remembered that he had set out a wild honeysuckle thar hisself, and he was glad.

When he found the rough slab o' slate-stone he seen that thar was more and finer roses thar than anywhar else; and he seen that these flowers had kivered up the letters "Murdered by Melvin Blair" at the bottom! All he seen was

HERE SLEEPS RAME BOWERS

He guessed the truth about the roses. Melvin Blair had planted them roses thar. Sack fell to his weary knees, bent his white head and told the Almighty that he was much obliged for a great many things.

THE WAS still a-kneelin' thar when old Josephine found him. She come a-hobblin' up to him and got down at his side on her own knees. She looked into his face and says,

"Sack," she says, "has yore heart changed at last? Sack, I don't think I can stand it if you tell me it hain't."

"Yes," says Sack, a-drawin' her gray old head over on his shoulder. "Yes, it's changed, forever and forever. Thar is nothin' on earth as good as to live out these few days which is left with you. Josephine, if we take a little rest now and then as we go, do you reckon we could make out to walk back to the old cabin and its touch-me-nots and buddin' marygolds?"

"I reckon we could," says Josephine. "I see that the p'ints o' the moon is turned straight up, and that's a shore sign o' fair weather—so we won't git rained on, nohow, in spite o' what the tree-frog says about it."

And then Josephine she tells Sack somethin' that shore would 'a' made him quit a-twiddlin' of his thumbs anytime.

"Sack, honey," she says, "I was always afeard to tell you, and so was everybody else—and then I wanted you to change yore heart without a-knowin' it. Do you remember the time, Sack, honey, when you knocked Jim Marberry down for a-mentionin' Melvin Blair to you? Sack, honey, Jim had started to tell you that Melvin Blair was dead. Melvin Blair has been dead and buried six years, Sack."

Viva Marcelina

by Ledward Rawlinson

IN ANDESIA, that sleepy little republic perched on the roof of the high Andes, detectives always wear blue glasses when on duty. There is some deep, dark and subtle reason for this, but it has never yet been disclosed to a foreigner.

Tomas Morales was a detective, a little bit of a slow-moving, day-dreaming fellow, with a broad, stolid face of copper-bronze and a big droll eye like an elephant's. By birth Tomas was a shoemaker, but, along with Lorenzo Caceres, a swarthy young tailor, he was shanghaied into the police department of the capital city of La Piña and compelled to remain there against his will at the nominal salary of nothing per year.

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The all-powerful Intendente de Policia placed these two coca-chewing, cigarette-smoking citizens upon his psychic pay-roll in order that he might utilize their services whenever his clothes or his shoes needed repair or replacement, a very satisfactory combination from his own point of view.

The victims did not rebel at this treatment, for they knew full well that rebellion would mean an indefinite stay in jail, or in the army, which was worse. So, in the fervent hope that the chief of police would succeed in his evident ambition to drink himself to death at the earliest possible moment, they went forth to labor in an unknown vineyard.

Of a truth they made no arrests, and of a truth Lorenzo never attempted so to do, but Tomas tried hard to distinguish himself. It was labor in vain. Of course the little shoemaker was somewhat at a disadvantage. No one would commit a murder, rob a church or attempt any kind of infamy while he was in sight, and as for purse-snatching, that was almost an unknown sport in Andesia.

The reason for the latter state of affairs lay in the fact that the natives carry their money in little bags about their necks. In order to pick a man's pocket it is necessary to strangle him first, and it is not always convenient for an open-air burglar to do this.

However, the sleuth did one good piece of work. He killed a dog, a very large and very savage one. The newspaper printed a column and a half about it.

As in other less civilized places, considerable graft came the way of the police department—carload-lots of frijoles, garabanzas, and red peppers, but after the purple-faced, pin-eyed Intendente had taken his percentage of the loot, there was nothing left. It was only by working at their own particular trades after the bloodhounding of the day was over that Tomas and Lorenzo were able to live at all.

TO MAKE life more interesting, they were both desperately in love with the same girl and, strange as it may seem, both engaged to marry her. Marcelina Castanovas was the lady's name.

Marcelina was the beautiful and dutiful daughter of a well-respected couple who were related to each other by marriage. She was nineteen years old, and for a livelihood she spent her waking hours in the market-place selling eggs that were but a trifle younger than herself. Tall, slim and healthy, she was poor in station yet rich beyond the dreams of Midas, fortune having bestowed upon her a happy, fiercely tanned face and a pair of bonnie blue eyes that were the envy of every dusky maid in that black-eyed land. And, whether in the drab home-spun clothes of a market-woman or in the gaudy fiesta dress of a Chola, with pink silk shawl and high shoes of soft white kid, she was just the same handsome, striking blaze of passionate personality.

Gay and capricious, now as warm in her affection as a tropic sun, again as cold and distant as a Wintry moon, she tantalized her love-sick swains to almost the last verge of endurance, and refused to give the one or the other the slightest indication of preference. It was hard indeed for the women of La Piña to understand Marcelina. Nay, it was more than hard; it was impossible. She was unfathomable.

Tomas, they unanimously agreed, would make an excellent husband, for he was a good-natured boy of four and twenty, open, honest and true, while Lorenzo was a sullen, silent counterfeit of a man, tall and lean, with hollow, sallow cheeks and thick black hair. Furthermore, he was very fond of wine.

Of course Marcelina had no intention of wearing two wedding-rings or of cooking frijoles for two husbands. No, señor. She merely promised that she would assign any rights that she might have in herself to the one who first acquired fifty pesos for a grand wedding-celebration, with music and dancing and lots of *chicha* for the guests to get properly drunk on. But fifty pesos was a lot of money. Neither Tomas nor Lorenzo had ever had so much wealth at any period of his life and, in the attempt to get it, they both suffered indescribable tortures of mind and body.

To be exact, Tomas had just five pesos in the Bank of All Saints, and Lorenzo had none, this the result of eleven months of determined effort. It should also be mentioned that Tomas had a very rich and miserly bachelor uncle. This uncle, who lived some distance from the city, owned a mule, a dog and a sheep, also a potato-patch on the side of the hill where several

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potatoes grew regularly every year, no matter how bad the weather might be. The little detective once fired a red-hot hint at Marcelina in regard to this, but she remarked that uncle was only a hundred years of age and from all indications he was good for quite a long time to come. She was not to be snared with prospective legacies.

The days went by, the weeks rolled on. One morning there was great excitement at police headquarters in La Piña. During the night two very serious things had happened. A man was brutally murdered in the fish-market and a mule was stolen from the stable of a prominent citizen. The whole town was keyed to a high pitch of excitement. Multitudinous were the theories that were advanced to account for the murder.

But eventually the half-drunken Intendente lifted up his big fat hand and silenced the theorists forever by giving his own personal opinion.

"I DO not believe there is any connection between these two cases," he declared with marvelous sagacity. "The man had been dead for several hours before the mule disappeared. I do not think he could have committed the theft."

Wherefore the excited natives nodded their approval. The great man with the sunless face had spoken, and the great man was always right.

Moreover, to say him nay was to go to jail.

At 9 A. M., when Tomas elbowed through the crowd to report for duty and to receive orders, the Intendente handed him a slip of paper.

"Morales," he mumbled, "we're up against it. I want you to get to work on this case quick, and don't come back till you've cleared up the mystery. The honor of the police-department is at stake. A man was found dead in the fish-market early this morning, fearfully lacerated. His assassin must be a man of ferocious character and enormous strength. He is a menace to our city; life will be unsafe till he is under lock and key."

Tomas went very pale and his legs began to shake. He attempted to speak, but words failed him.

"Question all suspicious persons and Americans," continued the Intendente solemnly, "and keep a sharp lookout for incriminating evidence. Stay near the scene of the tragedy as much as possible, and blow your whistle five times the moment you get a clue. I will then have the streets cleared that you may follow the scent without interruption. This is the chance of your life to make yourself famous. *Me comprende?*"

"*Sí señor,*" stammered Tomas through chattering teeth.

"Then get busy," was the stern command.

Shaking like a reed in the wind and streaming with perspiration, the unhappy detective removed his shoes, put on his official blue glasses and pulled a battered derby hat over his ears. Then, with a melancholy, resigned-to-the-inevitable look on his face, he crept to the door. Suddenly the Intendente called him back.

"First take this to Lorenzo and tell him to get to work quick," commanded the official, holding out another slip of paper. "Somebody stole one of Señor Escobar's mules last night—a brown one with black eyes—and he wants it back. He offers fifty pesos reward to the man that returns the animal to him."

Fifty pesos! For a second Tomas stood as if dazed by a blow from a blackjack, then he gathered himself together and, with a trembling "*Sí señor,*" he took the paper and staggered out to the street, endeavoring vainly to silence the voice of the Tempter in his ears.

Fifty pesos! The price of Marcelina! The price of the fairest maid in all the land, the maid with the sea-blue eyes and the red roses in her hair. To his rival, to his bitterest enemy, had the Intendente given the opportunity to earn the money, a live mule being of more value than a dead Indian.

No, it could not be, it could not be. Lorenzo should run to earth the fiendish murderer and get the fame. He himself would track the mule and get the pesos. He was not a coward, of that he was firmly convinced, but for Marcelina's sake he must not risk his life. The Intendente was drunk most of the time and in all probability would never know the difference.

Up and down the cobbled gullies paced the little sleuth, laboring earnestly with his conscience and attempting to find a means to propitiate the saints before committing the unpardonable sin of changing the orders. Of a sudden he received an inspiration. It

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was Saturday—Beggars' Day—and the Plaza de San Sebastian would be crowded with unfortunate creatures who were blind, lame, twisted by beri-beri and swollen with elephantiasis. He searched his pockets. There was just fifty centavos. To ten of the beggars he would give half a real.

THUS it was that the saints were propitiated, thus it was that the orders were changed. The tailor went cautiously out on the hunt for the assassin and the shoemaker sought the ass. But although Tomas employed all the latest Burns-Pinkerton methods and interrogated every man, woman and mule he could find, not one of them acted suspiciously or betrayed the slightest sign of self-incrimination. The lovesick swain was very discouraged, especially when he thought of the fifty centavos that he had so recklessly dissipated.

He had cast his bread upon the waters and it had gone down. It would never come back, despite the preacher's statement to the contrary.

That night as Tomas plodded his weary way to the little workshop in which he lived an idea flashed into his mind. His uncle had a brown mule which would eventually become his property. There being no possibility of borrowing the beast, it would not be a crime to steal it a little in advance. Of course not. Escobar would raise no objections. What he wanted was a mule, either his own or another that was long on work and short on oats.

It took Tomas a long time to make up his mind to commit such a foul piece of brigandage upon an old and unsuspecting relative, but solely for the sake of Marcelina's happiness the horrible decision was made.

After a bowl of *cazuelo* and a chunk of hard, dry bread, the sleuth put on his gaudy *poncho*, took his guitar from its hook on the wall and started out on the long tramp across the sterile pampa. It was a wretched night, dark and drear and lonely, but smiling and singing and chuckling to himself, the little fellow trudged happily along, comforting himself with the thought that Marcelina would soon be his, and *vice-versa*. Just as the first gray light of dawn was creeping up through the east, he sighted the home of his uncle perched on the slope of a little hill.

It was an old house with a monastic, medieval and mozarabic aspect when viewed from a distance. Proximity rather spoiled this effect and reduced it to a miserable one-room dobie shack that served as a combination country-home, barn, chicken-coop and stable. Things are not always what they seem, as the Leghorn hen said when she hatched a Long Island duck.

Half an hour later the detective stood knocking on the door. Immediately it was opened by an ancient, toothless Indian, gnarled and twisted like an old tree, and bent like an Inca mummy. Rags covered his body from head to foot; sandals he had none. The old fellow was glad indeed to see his nephew and embraced him in a truly affectionate manner, patting him gently on the back and murmuring softly to himself.

Preliminaries over, Tomas followed his uncle into the cabin. In one corner a sheep and a dog lay on the bare earth floor, while opposite half a dozen scraggy chickens were struggling to release themselves from the string that bound their legs. In still another corner lay the mule, a hollow-eyed, wasted creature, quietly chewing on an old straw hat. Tomas gave a gasp of astonishment, his face turned a sickly jade.

"What has happened to Speedio?" he asked, with a troubled face.

"*No sé*—I do not know," answered the old man, glancing pathetically at the faithful animal. "He has been ailing of late. I feed him regularly once a week, but he doesn't seem to take the same interest in life that he once did."

For several moments the sleuth gazed in gloomy silence at the cadaverous beast. It was terribly disappointing, but after all half a mule was better than none at all. He could sneak the phantom into Escobar's stable under cover of darkness, collect the fifty pesos and start off on his honeymoon before the fraud was discovered. More things are wrought by Cupid than this world dreams of.

"I know what the trouble is, Uncle," declared Tomas at length as he laid down his guitar and took off his poncho. "The animal does not get enough exercise and fresh air."

"Maybe you're right," answered the old man, nodding his head. "Maybe you're right. He hasn't traveled a league in a long time. A little work might do him good."

Satisfied that he could accomplish his

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nefarious purpose, Tomas lighted the charcoal in the *brazero* and warmed up the everlasting stew, whereupon the two men sat together on the floor for a meal, chatting the while over the good old times when frijoles were down to seven cents and an alcoholic debauch that was good for two days cost only two reales. As soon as the last of the stew had vanished, Tomas steeled himself for the dirty work that lay before him.

"Uncle," said he, avoiding the old man's piercing eye, "it is a cold morning. There is no sun and the clouds hang low on the mountains. While you sit by the warm *brazero*, I will take the mule for a little exercise. No?"

The old man hesitated. Save for the barking of the dog, the bleating of the sheep and the enchanting melody of the chickens, the room was very still.

"All right," replied the miser at last. "But treat him very gently and under no circumstances get on his back."

HANDING over his guitar as bail that these instructions would be followed, the detective rose and approached the four-footed object of his machinations. But Speedio did not care to go out. He was content to remain where he was. And, although Tomas coaxed and begged and made all manner of promises, the mule simply blinked his big melancholy eyes and refused to get up on his feet. This tickled the old man immensely.

"Let me do it," he said with a hearty cackle. "He understands me."

Tomas readily accepted the offer and the miser hobbled forward. A moment later the mule was on his legs, that is on three of them. The other, for some reason, did not reach the ground. Speedio was really a sorry-looking spectacle. He was spavined and ringboned and knee-sprung, bony as a tuberculous tom-cat, and covered with cinch galls and miscellaneous bruises. His eyes rolled in his head and his body swayed perilously from side to side.

The old man suggested that exercise might prove harmful, but the crafty Tomas refused to second the motion and, after a lot of exasperating work, he finally succeeded in pushing the mule outside without dislocating any of his members. Just as exercise number one was about to commence, however, the animal again sat down.

Tomas swore softly to himself. There was murder in his heart. To bring Speedio to his feet again was a herculean task, but in the fulness of time the dauntless detective succeeded in his effort, and at a feeble, very feeble, gait, man and beast started off.

At the end of an hour, by dint of a great deal of pushing and pulling and bad language, the two had traveled half a mile. That was a most indecent pace, yet Tomas was not discouraged. He had a mule, and though only three of his legs were available for transportation, the animal at least had the one redeeming feature of being brown in color.

The morning wore on. To the great delight of the sleuth, Speedio limbered himself up in fine shape, and after a time he was careering recklessly along like a drunken race-horse. The sun was up now, a fierce tropic sun that burned and blazed through the thin mountain air, but under the influence of the sympathetic murmurings of his master, the mule plunged unsteadily forward. At noon, when a halt was made at the village of Silenco for luncheon, five miles had been covered.

Valgame dios! As a reward for good behavior Tomas stole about half a ton of *cebada* from a stable and presented it to the animal with appropriate words and caresses. This was too much for Speedio. Big wet tears rolled down from his eyes and he was visibly affected, but he ate just the same, ate like a python.

He was very grateful for that meal. When the time came to move on, he actually began to prance, notwithstanding the fact that he was considerably swollen through overindulgence in alfalfa. Ere long he was actually using all four legs. Tomas was delighted. By six o'clock, or seven at the latest, the fifty pesos would be his. He was happy as a reprieved murderer, and laughed and shouted with glee.

All afternoon, in spite of the merciless, implacable sun, the mule kept up a steady jog-trot, every once in a while bursting into speed as if pulling a hook-and-ladder brigade. It was glorious. At last night came on, and presently through the darkness there gleamed the lights of La Piña. Tomas could no longer restrain his desire to ride like a steel-clad cavalier of old into the city.

He halted the beast at a convenient boulder by the wayside and clambered tenderly aboard. That was a fatal mistake.

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Speedio lurched forward in a sincere attempt to do his best, but the load was too much for the old veteran. He came to a sudden stop, swayed to and fro for a moment, then went down with a crash that was heard for miles.

Had not Tomas jumped he surely would have been maimed for life. But it was easy to see that Speedio had eaten his last oat. He gave one long, reproachful look at his abductor, then quietly closed his eyes and became defunct.

IF IT be true that every human tear is counted, then for the next half-hour several angels must have been occupied, for Tomas turned loose a drenching downpour. He was *muy triste*, full of shame and remorse. Finally, when tears failed, he sat in the cold night air, holding his head in his hands and staring fixedly at the twinkling lights of the city.

He tried to pray, but could not. He was a thief. Under the blinding influence of passion he had committed an awful sin. God would never forgive him. Neither would his uncle. Henceforward he would be an outcast and a pariah, in addition to a detective, with always the haunting fear that the morrow might find him in a felon's cell.

Of a truth the outlook was draped with crêpe and weeping willows.

Benumbed and sick at heart, the sleuth staggered to his feet, took one last look at Speedio's corpse and continued his way to La Piña, resolved to end his unendurable torments in the foaming waters of the river. It was hard to go in the Springtide of life, but he was weary of the world. Marcelina would soon forget. Women always do.

Presently Tomas stood on the deserted bridge, looking down at the surging waters wherein men find oblivion and women wash clothes. Everything was very quiet and very dark. There was no moon and but few stars were attending to their duties. It was an ideal night for self-obliteration. Slowly the wretched youth took off his coat and climbed on to the coping, then with arms outstretched and face upturned to Heaven, he made his farewell speech.

Just as he was about to leap he heard voices. He drew quickly back to a dark corner. A moment later a man and a woman passed leisurely by, followed by an escort in the person of a Chola servant. The man was Lorenzo Caceres, the woman Marcelina Castanovas.

Bombs! Pistols! Dynamite! Daggers! The sight of his hated rival so unnerved Tomas that he forgot all about suicide and went rapidly off to his room, tearing at his hair and threatening to destroy the world. His heart throbbed with misery too helpless for tears.

That was an awful night. Most of the time the disconsolate victim of Cupid was half delirious. He tore the sheets of his bed into shreds, bit holes in the wall and generally devastated the furniture. But after every night, however long, there comes a golden morning, and when at last the light of dawn entered the little room the unhappy youth had regained control of his faculties.

Silently he sat amid the wreckage, holding a tête-à-tête with himself and planning his penitent course. The result of a lot of hard-pan meditation was that, so long as there was yet a chance to win Marcelina, he would not give in. She would never be happy with Lorenzo, never.

In a little café wherein he partook of a cup of chocolate and a roll, Tomas learned to his joy that the mule was still missing, the fish-market mystery still unsolved. With exemplary perseverance the detective then started a house-to-house canvass for the stolen animal, questioning every man, woman and child he came across until each proved that his life was beyond suspicion.

Two hours went by without result, then suddenly he got a clue. In one house an Indian lay asleep in bed, a sure and certain sign that he earned his daily bread by night, earned it dishonestly. It did not take a trained detective to deduce that; a child could have done it. Moreover, the man looked like a crook.

Tomas woke the sleeper with a poke in the ribs and applied the third degree. But the Indian only blinked his eyes and mumbled to himself, refusing to answer questions of any kind. The sleuth trembled with excitement, for he knew then that he was on the right track, that before the night was out the fifty pesos would be his. Marcelina would dance with joy. He could picture her happiness on hearing the news. Soon, now, they would link heart to heart, hand to hand forever.

But, though the human bloodhound searched the house and looked carefully

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under the bed, he was unable to locate the mule.

Peaceable methods proving ineffective, Tomas next decided to introduce a little foul play. Taking a running-jump, he landed full on his victim's stomach and sat there waving his arms and threatening unending tortures of an assorted character unless the man produced the missing animal. Of a sudden the figure of a buxom Chola woman appeared in the doorway. With a terrific but untranslatable shriek, she made for the detective, seized him firmly by the neck and dragged him gesticulating to the door.

"BRUTE!" she hissed, as she tenderly pulled out a handful of the mule-hunter's wiry black hair and flattened his nose with her hand. "My father has been in bed for five years, paralyzed through beri-beri."

Then followed an indescribable tussle in which the Chola was assisted by several women belonging to the sewing-circle of that precinct. Poor Tomas was torn almost limb from limb, and his sacred blue glasses were broken in a thousand pieces. Fortunately, at the end of five minutes, the unhappy youth managed to make his escape to the quiet and safety of the cathedral, else he surely would have been assassinated. As it was, his face was scratched, his clothes were torn and he wanted to die without further delay. The life of a plain-clothesman was far too hazardous.

For a long time Tomas sat trying to kill himself by mental telepathy but, having no luck at this, he decided to go down to the valley to the rubber-country and start life anew. When he thought it would be safe to leave his hiding-place, he came to his feet, crept to the door of the old cathedral and peeped cautiously outside.

Seated on the cobblestones of the Plaza, their bare brown legs crossed under them, were half a dozen stolid Indian women armed with various agricultural and culinary implements of a more or less homicidal character. At the head of this Amazonian reception-committee was the husky Chola whose father Tomas had maltreated. In her right hand was a dreadful machete such as a man carries when he marches into the capital of a Latin-American republic and proclaims himself president.

Dripping with the chilly sweat of anguish, the detective shot back into the sacred edifice and spent the next half-hour in prayer and supplication, casting furtive glances behind him lest the committee become impatient and attempt a little sacrilegious surgery inside. He was not a bit comfortable. He thought of his rival Lorenzo and envied him the peaceful task of waylaying a murderer. This was his punishment for changing the orders. Honesty is the best policy, even in the police-department.

An hour passed, an hour that was an eternity of the deadliest terror. Again the youth came to his feet and again he peeped outside. The committee was still there and the members thereof were partaking of luncheon. They had come prepared to stay.

This was the finish. A broken man, Tomas crept to a corner of the cathedral and arranged his personal affairs. Upon the back of an envelope he wrote a short poem and also his last will and testament, leaving all his personal property—a suit of clothes and two pairs of shoes—to Marcelina.

Then he sat with his head between his knees, weeping quietly to himself. Presently some one touched him on the shoulder; he sprang into the air with a cry, begging for mercy. But it was only the padre.

"My son, what is the matter?" inquired the priest.

Bowed with grief and shaking from fear, Tomas poured out the sordid story of his wickedness. Though removed from the world and wotting not of the disorder that has traveled hand in hand with true love since the beginning of time, the padre understood.

"You have committed a grievous sin, my son," he declared, "a grievous sin. But you are not altogether to blame. I will help you. Compose yourself and come with me."

A ray of hope entered the detective's soul. He rose quickly and followed the priest down the aisle to the vestry. Ten minutes later, dressed in the long brown robe and the black felt hat of an ecclesiastic, with a pious look on his face, fingers interlocked, and eyes upturned to Heaven, Tomas walked slowly out of the cathedral.

His heart actually ceased beating as he passed by his would-be assassins, but none penetrated his disguise and soon he was across the plaza, safe.

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SUDDENLY an Indian accosted him.

"Padre," said the man, with trouble writ deep in his face, "I would speak to you."

Tomas hesitated. He did not know just what to do. But the women were too near to run any risks.

"What is it, my son?" he stammered finally.

For answer the Indian led the way to his squalid home on the corner of the street and into a little darkened room, wherein he motioned his visitor to be seated on a box covered by a *vicuña* skin. Professional instinct, as well as the man's troubled face, told Tomas that an awful crime had been committed. He wondered what it could be. It was wrong to get evidence in this way, but—— Like a flash he remembered the fish-market mystery. Here was the murderer and he was about to confess!

Tomas trembled like an eel in a frying-pan. A gone feeling came into his stomach. He wanted to run for help but could not; the use had gone from his limbs. There was a long and sickly silence.

At last the Indian spoke:

"Padre," he said miserably, "my heart is heavy."

"What have you done?" whispered the sleuth through chattering teeth.

"I stole a mule," was the answer.

Tomas fell from the box on to the floor.

"What kind of a mule was it?" he shrieked.

"It was a brown mule belonging to Señor Escobar."

The sleuth came to his feet with a cry.

"Where is it?" he ejaculated eagerly, taking the Indian by the arm. "Where is it? Speak quick!"

"I took it back to the stable half an hour ago, but the sin still lies heavy on my heart."

THAT was too much for Tomas. He threw up his arms with a wild gesture of despair, then turned his back on the wondering Indian and limped weakly from the room. The last hope had died. Dazed and helpless, the spark of his existence all but extinguished, the wretched youth wandered aimlessly about the city, praying for a speedy end to his miseries. Of a sudden at a turn in the road he met *vis-à-vis* with his rival, Lorenzo Caceres. And Lorenzo was happily, boisterously, talkatively drunk.

"Hello, Tomas," he said, reeling unsteadily about, "are you coming from a fancy-dress ball or have you taken the veil?"

"I'm disguised," answered Tomas coldly. "Did you solve the murder-mystery?"

"No. The Intendente called me off the case and took it up himself. After walking through the fish-market and looking over the evidence, he solved the problem immediately. He is a wise man, señor, a very wise man. This is his solution: The Indian was thawing out two large female codfish that had been sent up from the coast in cold storage—frozen alive. The heat revived them and they started fighting. In trying to separate them, the poor fellow was bitten unmercifully from head to foot. He staggered to the door but died in great agony before he reached it."

For a moment the two stared at each other in silence, then Lorenzo took a fat roll of peso bills from his pocket.

"But I came out all right," he went on with a grin. "I found a hundred pesos on the corpse."

That was the unkindest cut of all. The heart of the little sleuth sank a thousand fathoms and a jealous rage consumed his vitals.

"I suppose this spree you're on is to celebrate your wedding," he murmured icily.

"No," growled Lorenzo. "It's not. Marcelina won't marry me because she's in love with you, and has been all the time. That fifty-peso scheme of hers was just to keep me out of the race. She was sure I'd never get it, but she wanted to tantalize you and keep you guessing for a while. She says she'll marry you as you are—without a cent."

And to her everlasting credit Marcelina did.

Viva Marcelina!

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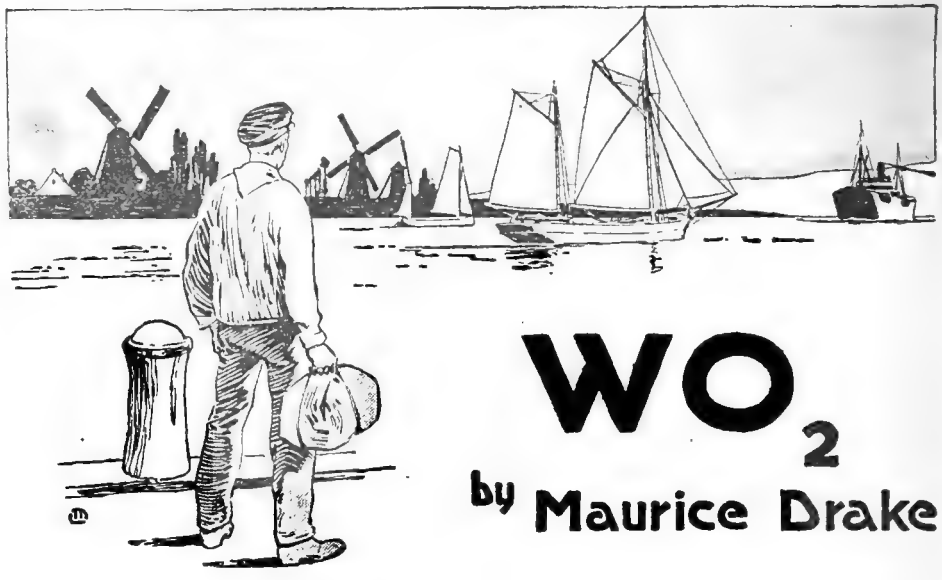

WO_2

by Maurice Drake

SYNOPSIS—How can a trading-company send cargoes from England to Holland, returning with mud ballast, at a loss every trip, yet make enormous profits? It's true, and it horribly puzzles the crew of the stout ketch *Luck and Charity*—**James Carthew-West,** the skipper and owner—once a liner-officer, then beach-comber, then a man on his feet. It puzzles still more **Austin Voogdt,** who was a London newspaper-man till tuberculosis sent him, with his whimsical humor and incisive mind, out to sea. The third member of the crew doesn't care a hang, for he is silent **'Kiah,** who asks nothing more than work and sleep.

The company for whom they are working consists of Professor **Ward, Cheyne**—the local manager at Terneuzen, Holland—and two girls: the stately Miss **Lavington** and quick-tongued, lively **Pamily Brand,** who proves to be a Bachelor of Science for all her tomboyishness.

To add to the mystery, there is a German Company just opened at Terneuzen, one of whose men takes a shot at Voogdt, the journalist, when he goes poking about.

Then Voogdt discovers that the "mud" they have been carrying back as ballast is almost pure WO_2—used for hardening steel, and worth £240 a ton. West and Voogdt demand to be taken in as partners. This is done the more readily because of the mystery of the rival German company, and **Van Noppen,** its manager.

Then Manager Cheyne, with his beefy face and weak mouth, suggests to the two new partners that they join him in sequestering several boat-loads of the "mud," and share the profits among the three of them. They pretend to agree, but inform Professor Ward of Cheyne's crookedness.

CHAPTER XXV

PLAYING CHEYNE'S GAME

PERHAPS, Ward had hoped, Cheyne wouldn't again try to cheat Ward and the girls by asking Voogdt and me to divert cargoes of wolframite. Cheyne did, though. He tried it the very next voyage.

But when we next met he was raving. His customer had sent a hauler to fetch away the mud, and the man, naturally ignorant of the stuff he had to deal with, hauled ten tons of worthless ballast dumped by a dredger and put it on rail. The customer, advised of its departure, sold it, rubbed his hands and woke a morning or two later to find a bundle of furious letters on his desk, ordering him to remove his rubbish. Cheyne was dancing mad, cursing and furious, and accusing us of having mucked the affair. Voogdt tried to pacify him, pointing out that removal from quays was one of our ordinary risks, and then joined me in the cabin. I hadn't seen much fun in it, up to then, but now we literally cried with laughter, stuffing our mouths with the table-cloth to stifle the noise. It cheered me up considerably, that.

The customer was bullying Cheyne and requesting delivery of the promised consignment, so he pressed us to have another try on the same lines, and this voyage very

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nearly gave away the fact that we had warned Ward about Cheyne's crookedness. Our destination was Goole, and we were to leave the stolen half-cargo at Yarmouth.

Here, being questioned, Voogdt told a story of fussy owners who insisted on overballasting us, and said we were lightening the boat against orders. I never heard a more improbable tale, and of course the harbor-master's suspicion was excited at once.

"Why didn't you heave it over outside?" he demanded.

Voogdt talked of the difficulty of getting the hatch off at sea and so on, and then, getting desperate, embroidered the story with whispered confidences about a woman at Yarmouth he said I had come ashore to visit.

"On'y a bloomin' excuse, this lightening the boat," he told the man. "Say nothin', guv'nor. The skipper's orl right. Shouldn't be surprised if you found 'arf a quid in your letter-box the day we sailed."

Knowing nothing of this, I was at a loss to understand the man's manner. Under the circumstances, he gave me a bad time for the next two days, nudging and leering and winking at me every time we met, as one who shares a confidence. Voogdt enjoyed it intensely, he told me afterward, and finished by filling up his victim with mixed drinks so that we left him jovial and apparently unsuspicious.

"But what'll he think when the stuff gets carted away?" I asked, when we were clear of the harbor.

"It won't be carted away. I wired Ward in code: *'Amanuensis Syllable,'* which, being interpreted, means, *'Suspicions aroused; remove by sea.'* "

"Think he'll manage it?"

"Bet your life he will. He and his Birmingham manager, Carwithen, are two men with big heads. I'm developing a sound respect for the pair of them, now I've had some experience of their trade. They'll manage it all right."

THEY did, and when we got back to Terneuzen from Goole, Cheyne was past swearing, even. His customer had been compelled to buy from Ward to fill his first orders. Ward, smiling quietly, had squeezed the price up to its top limit to punish him, and the customer had written Cheyne a letter that nearly turned him gray. He got little comfort from us.

"Tell your customer they're ordinary business-losses, under the circumstances," Voogdt suggested maliciously to Cheyne.

"What's the use of talking that sort of rot? He threatens he'll accidentally give me away unless the goods are delivered."

"He doesn't write you here, does he?" I asked, startled.

"No fear. Antwerp post-office. I go there to fetch his letters."

"He must know you're thieving, or he wouldn't talk of exposure."

"Thieving!" He didn't like it put so brutally as that. "Choose your words better. And if it is thieving, you're in it too."

"We know all about that," Voogdt interrupted, suddenly taking the offensive. "We're in it, right enough, but where does our pay come in? You make a lot of promises; we do our part of the business; and then all you have to show us is a letter from your customer to say he hasn't had the goods. That's no manner of use to me. You've got to pay us for delivery on shore, and that's all there is about it. If things are bungled after we've done our share of the work, that's no fault of ours."

"They're only ordinary business-losses."

Cheyne, aghast at the sudden attack, found it his turn to plead our disregarded excuse.

"That may be. We haven't learned the game as well as you have," said Voogdt truculently. "All I know is that we've done thieving at your orders, and now we aren't to get paid for it. You'll oblige me by brassing up a hundred apiece—fifty quid a voyage—to compensate us for our trouble."

Cheyne was flabbergasted.

"When you get a cargo through, I will. I promise I will. But surely, my dear chap, you don't expect me to pay you on top of my losses?"

He was livid, and I must confess Voogdt's sudden turning of the tables had taken me aback.

"I do expect it. And what's more I mean having the money. So you just get out your check-book before we go any farther into the matter."

Cheyne protested, pleaded, cursed and swore, but all to no effect. We had him fast, and in the end he fished out the

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check-book from his desk and wrote us one apiece to the tune of a hundred pounds, shaking with rage and funk.

"Good enough," said Voogdt coolly, pocketing both the slips. "Now, about this next voyage. Dumping half a load of ballast on this quay, and another half-load on that doesn't appear to work out properly. And it's dangerous, too. The lies I had to tell at Yarmouth this last voyage wouldn't deceive a sucking child, and the next thing'll be that we shall blow the gaff. We'll work one more cargo through for you, and then I'm finished. And that cargo won't go ashore at all. You or your pal must charter a barge, bring her alongside in some anchorage, in France for preference—Brest Roads'll do as well as anywhere—and we'll unload into her."

"That'll never do——"

"It's got to do. It's all very well for you to be careless. You've made your pile. I haven't, and I don't intend this show shall be given away until I have. So make your own arrangements, but remember we don't put another ounce of stuff ashore for you anywhere."

Cheyne had to give in, of course. We were to make a couple of voyages on the square, and by that time he thought he could arrange for the transshipment Voogdt ordered.

CONFUSED by all the mist of lying, I could not see that Voogdt's was a very good plan, and when Cheyne had gone taxed him with double-dealing.

"Thanks to you he'll pull that off," I said. "Are you playing straight, Austin?"

"Straight!" said he cheerfully. "Straight, did you say? What is there straight in the whole business? The firm is stealing—from the Dutch Government, I suppose. Cheyne's trying to steal from them; and we're blackmailing him. But what can we do, Jem? We dare not go on playing Cheyne's game. We dare not open his eyes. And we dare not let his customer make trouble! I'm acting as I believe Ward would act in my place. I propose to let them have this one cargo to shut the customer's mouth—reporting it to Birmingham, of course—and after that we must hope Cheyne's too scared to try it again. If we refuse to help him, he'll get somebody else, and that means more risk. The two hundred we've got out of him and our two-thirds share of the theft we'll send to Brum to be divided in the usual way. That'll go toward squaring the loss on Cheyne's share of this next stolen cargo. Add the two cargoes we've bagged—on which he hasn't got a share—and I should think the firm is a bit ahead on the game. Can you suggest a better plan?"

"Not I. Devising roguery isn't my strong point. But you're a bit of a marvel, Austin. It beats me the way the chap's been headed off at every turn. You're a wonder."

"Rot!" said he, chuckling. "That's Ward's doing. Look how he tackled the situation in Newhaven. It's been good fun, so far. But, mind you, once a man's off the straight track it's not so easy for him to pull up. Probably Cheyne won't try this dodge again, but we must watch him. He'll be up to something else, or I'm much mistaken."

Ward met us at our next port, Erith, and Voogdt made his report. He listened, saying nothing, until Voogdt proposed the payment of our shares and Cheyne's two hundred pounds into the common fund of the syndicate.

Then he raised objections.

"There's no reason for that," he said. "Keep it for yourselves."

Voogdt shook his head. "No. We don't want more than our fair share as agreed, and personally I don't want extra profits out of Cheyne's defection."

Ward looked pleased, but he still protested.

"We've done well, and are ready to retire. You're not. Your pockets aren't full yet. Take it. At this rate the business may collapse any day, and since you've been so fair with us I should like you to make your profits before the end comes."

"Speaking for myself," I said, "I absolutely refuse to touch Cheyne's hundred pounds. It's blackmail, nothing better, and though he's a sweep and I'm not over-particular, I draw the line somewhere."

So there we were, at another deadlock. Neither of the others wanted the money, and for the moment it looked as though Cheyne had been bled for nothing.

"Add it to 'Kiah's bonuses," Voogdt suggested at last. "As for the profits of the thieving, we both wish them to be sent you and divided in the usual way."

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After we had pressed the point a while, Ward eventually agreed.

CHAPTER XXVI

"AND ALL THE THINGS THAT GO WITH EVENING-DRESS"

BUSINESS once concluded, Ward had a personal message to deliver. Miss Brand was at Erith, and please would we join her at dinner that evening? We thanked him, and promised to come, and then, as he had only mentioned one girl's name, I asked if Miss Lavington was with her.

"Not this time," said he. "She's on duty at Birmingham. Carwithen's busy and wants her help."

"Does she take an active part in the business, then?"

I ought to have known better than ask the question, the two girls having been present at so many sittings in council. But I never really associated either of them with active work—especially such work as shipping-business, and a sort of modified piracy at that. What with Pamily Brand being related to Cheyne, and Ward and Miss Lavington almost as good as engaged, I looked upon them as a sort of family-party, and regarded the girls' talk as something to be listened to for civility's sake, but not to be considered as anything important after that. So the idea of Miss Lavington actually doing office-work at Snow Hill struck me as strange.

"Of course she does," said Ward. "We all help. Didn't Miss Brand go through your papers once at Dartmouth?"

"She came aboard and looked them over, certainly. But, to tell the truth, I never imagined she understood them."

I expect I spoke awkwardly, for I couldn't well tell him I believed she only came aboard with a view to luring me on to try and flirt with her.

"She understands the business very well," Ward said, interrupting my thoughts. "I don't know how we should have got along without her—and Miss Lavington. You see we couldn't do with paid employees. The business ashore wanted intelligence, and if we'd hired quick-witted people our secret wouldn't have been our own for very long. Cheyne and myself tried to do all of it at first, but soon found that impossible, so took in Carwithen. As a paid manager he would have been a danger. As a partner he's been worth his weight in gold. When we got into touch with more purchasers and the business again got beyond us, it was at his suggestion that we asked the two girls if they would help us."

"How could they help?" I asked curiously.

"They did help, I can assure you. They flung themselves into the business wholeheartedly. Miss Lavington learned to use a typewriter and took over the correspondence and bookkeeping. She and Carwithen have charge of the office, and most of the work inland—the actual selling to customers. I help them a little in that. The London and South and West of England sales are in my hands, and I also see to removing the consignments from the ports along the English Channel. That's how it is you've seen more of me than of the others."

"What does Miss Brand do?"

"Hitherto she's had the East Coast and Scotch ports in her charge. Now that the *Olive Leaf* and *Kismet* are paid off, she's supposed to be helping at the office, but there's really very little for her to do there with only your cargoes to watch. So she's come down here with me as a sort of holiday-trip."

I said that Erith in March didn't strike me as much of a place for holidaying.

"Ah! But she's the sort of girl that can make a holiday out of a ride on a bus. I fancy one of the attractions here was the chance of another squabble with you."

He looked at Voogdt with a smile.

"By the way, when you see her don't harp on this business of Cheyne's. She's partial to him. They're related, you know—were playmates as children—so she takes this more seriously than the rest of us."

His way of speaking was quietly frank, and seemed to put us on the footing of personal friends as well as partners. That was just the difference between him and Cheyne. The one never mentioned Pamela Brand but I wanted to kick him, even when he only meant to be affable. But when I had been an employee Ward's manner had never held offense, and now, without gush or effusiveness, he spoke as though we two were members of the family-party and had been so all along.

"Has she said anything about Cheyne?" I asked.

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"Not to me. But Miss Lavington tells me she's taking the matter to heart, rather. So keep off the subject all you can."

ERITH, being a small but busy port, and near London, had proved a very convenient place for the syndicate's operations, and several cargoes of wolframite had crossed its quays during the past twelve months. Miss Brand, in her capacity of agent, had consequently become familiar with the town—had her own regular lodgings in a house out on the London Road—and it was to her rooms that we were invited. Ward was staying at a hotel by the dock-entrance, so as to be near us, and we were to call for him on our way up-town.

We dressed ourselves for shore in our usual fashion, in clean flannel shirts and collars and our best serge suits, and I was rather amused than otherwise to find when we reached the hotel that Ward had got into evening-dress.

"I suppose our clothes'll do?" I said, more in jest than earnest. I couldn't imagine the Brand girl in fine raiment. "We've a good excuse, anyhow. One doesn't carry dress-duds on a coaster."

"Of course," said Ward, as though dismissing the question, and we went on our way with minds at ease.

It was dark when we reached the house, and I could only make it out as a fair-sized villa residence standing back from the road with gardens front and rear. A clean elderly maid took Ward's coat and our peaked caps in the hall and showed us into a candle-lit room with the table laid and a cheerful wood-fire burning.

Ward sat down, Voogdt went straight to the fire—he was always a cold subject—and I was walking round trying to make out the pictures on the walls when the door opened again and our hostess entered. And, speaking for myself, I wished I could sink through the floor. I don't know when I ever had such a surprise in my life.

To begin with I hadn't seen a woman in evening-dress close at hand since my two years of folly in South Devon, and they weren't—well, the class of women I had known there that went in for evening-wear had always a little tendency toward slovenliness. Only natural, when you come to think of it. The wasters and their wives, and their wives' sisters and cousins, had made up all the society I enjoyed then. A waster naturally marries a barmaid ninety-nine times in a hundred, and of course her first purchase after marriage would be an evening-frock, to consort with the dignity of her husband's double-barreled name. Then the remittances that had been ample for one became a tight fit for two, and the evening-frocks soon got slovenly.

Poor little women—good wives, most of them. . . . But—associating with them, and with uneducated sailors ever since, I had come to link in my mind the idea of a low-necked dress with some faint suggestion of impropriety. You can't help being influenced by the notions of the men about you, and the poorer seamen as a class consider bare shoulders improper in themselves. I suppose they get their ideas from the filthy *cafés chantants* in the ports. . . .

Then, again, I had lost touch with drawing-rooms. For nearly a year my home had been a three-cornered box of a cabin, nine feet long by twelve wide, and I'd shared that with another man. 'Kiah kept it clean enough for our purpose, but his methods weren't highly polished, at best. We weren't exactly insanitary, but Keating's Powder always made a feature in the grocery-list, and 'Kiah rather plumed himself on it than otherwise, for boats of our class don't often go to that expense. Our usual cargo was mud, and the atmosphere of the ports we touched at principally coal-dust.

We didn't complain, naturally, because coasting is a rough trade and cleanliness an unusual luxury for the men engaged in it. I hadn't seen a bathroom for a year; a bucket and sponge in the cabin or an occasional swim overside had served my needs well enough. And now, fresh from that atmosphere of dirt and slovenliness and sweating hard work, it came a bit queer to be confronted with a girl one had always associated with open air and salt water, and find her dressed to kill, dainty as a flower.

Her dress was plain enough, with no frills or furbelows, and she looked sleek and demure as a kitten, and—what I'd never noticed before—really pretty, too. Remember, I'd never seen her except on board or in some port or another, and there she had always been simply and even poorly dressed. Tweeds were her wear;

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tweed or serge, plainly cut, and often well-worn at that, with a straw hat and a plain blouse—that sort of thing. Again and again she had reminded me more of a boy in petticoats than anything else; but now—— She wasn't in the least like a boy now, at any rate.

I'M NO man-milliner, and to this day I can't tell what she had on, though I can see her plainly enough every time I shut my eyes. I know her dress was a pale dove-gray, very soft and clinging smoothly, so as to show the round curves of her. Her arms were bare, rounded and pinky white. I couldn't picture them now akimbo on her hips, nor could I recognize in her any trace of the quick little shrew who had squabbled with Voogdt across a cabin full of crumpled foresail.

She had taken on an air of costliness; her hair was done elaborately, twisted in coils around the top of her little head, and round her neck she had a collar of pearls. Miss Out-o'-Doors I'd called her in my mind, but now she looked as though she'd never been outside a drawing-room. It was as though a tough little sea-pink had become an exotic from the hothouse.

I stared so—with my mouth open, as likely as not—that I think she must have felt a little shy; just enough to make her play the dignified hostess for the first few minutes. She blushed, too, and of course that made things worse than ever. What with that, and what with the strange new daintiness of her, and what with my serge clothes and thick boots, I felt so awkward that I thought I should never get out a civil answer to her greetings.

It was all over in a moment: just a "How d'you do" and "I'm glad to see you;" and she had turned to Ward and Voogdt, and left me with my ears burning, wondering at the prettiness of her bare neck and trim waist seen from behind. While she was talking to them, I had time to catch my breath, to pull myself together and resolve to try and behave more like a civilized man and less like a foremast-Jack ashore.

After the first few minutes, that came easily, for she hadn't changed her manners with her frock, and her chatter soon set me at ease again. Only when we sat down I couldn't take my eyes off her. Ward sat facing her, Voogdt was on her right and I was opposite him. I think the dinner was simple enough, though I don't know in the least what was served: fish and a fowl and sweets, or something like that, with claret to drink and lemonade. The elderly maid waited on us, and until she withdrew with the last of the dishes the talk was necessarily on general subjects.

When the door shut behind her Miss Brand took a cigarette, leaned forward and plunged directly into the very subject we had been warned to avoid.

"Business before pleasure," said she. "I want the whole of this story about Willis."

She looked at me; I looked at Voogdt and we both turned awkwardly to Ward, who answered for the pair of us.

"My last words on leaving the *Luck and Charity* this afternoon were to warn these two to keep off that subject," he said.

"And why?"

"Well—for your comfort."

"Comfort!" she cried, with sudden passion, and slapped a hand upon the table. "Why will you persist in this attitude of shielding tender woman from the cold wind? Haven't I worked for the syndicate like a man?"

"Better than most men," Ward answered her.

"Then why can't you treat me like a man?"

"Because you aren't one. Because you approach a business-matter with heat, and bang tables and make us all uncomfortable. That's why."

"I'm sorry." She was shamefaced on the instant. "I'm very sorry. But he's my cousin, as you know—and I thought a lot of Willis. I won't be silly again. Now, Mr. Voogdt, tell me the whole story plainly. I must know it, you know."

WITH her elbows on the table she listened quietly, never moving except to blink or wave away the cigarette smoke when it got into her eyes, while Voogdt went over the whole story again. Now that she was exercising self-control, no one would have imagined the matter had any importance for either of them. He spoke without a trace of heat or sneering or emphasis of any sort, and she never once interrupted or showed any trace of emotion whatever. When he had done her manner was as cool and collected as though she had no interest in the affair, and

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I began to recollect what Ward had said about her business-ability.

"You think it wise to let him have this promised cargo?" she asked.

Voogdt gave his reasons, like a man reciting a lesson.

"I don't see any other alternative," he concluded.

"Nor do I. But—— We must do it, I quite see, but it's annoying to be compelled to give them anything at all. And suppose he wants it done again?"

"He sha'n't do that. We'll make that clear to him, rest assured. And, as I've already pointed out to West, I don't think the firm will be much out of pocket on the deal in the end."

"Somebody must be there to keep an eye on him," she said with decision. "You'll be away on voyages. There's nothing to prevent him making those voyages long ones, and in your absence he can do as he likes. I must stay at Terneuzen myself after this."

"If I've anything to say about it, you won't," I said, finding my tongue at last.

"And why not?"

She had never put me on the same footing as Voogdt, but now her manner was positively insulting.

"Because it's no place for a woman. We don't know what risks there are, and we do know that Cheyne can't be relied on."

"Do you think I want Willis Cheyne to look after me?" she said sharply. "On the contrary. I'm going there to look after him."

"That's a man's job."

"I've already told you to consider me as a man. I was doing a man's work before you were a member of the syndicate, and I don't see that your joining it affects my position."

She turned to Ward.

"I'll stay there till the end," she said.

"The end?" I asked, puzzled, for she spoke as though the end were already in sight.

She still looked at Ward.

"Tell them what we decided when we took them into partnership," she ordered.

"Oh! that." Ward spread his hand on the table, examining his finger-nails minutely.

"We—ah—we decided that if we didn't approve of you as partners we would throw up the whole business. We've made enough out of it for our purposes, you see."

"Why didn't you throw it up at once?" Voogdt asked.

"It didn't matter much, one way or the other. I think West's work throughout the Winter decided us as much as anything. Cheyne pointed out that he'd served us loyally through a very trying Winter——"

"The deuce he did!" I said. "Why, he detests me."

"Whether he detests you or not, he protested strongly against any suggestion of throwing up the business."

"Has he drawn his profits as they became due?" Voogdt asked, and Ward nodded.

"That explains it. He's broke. I guessed as much, from half a dozen little signs."

"It's impossible," Pamily Brand said. "We're—we're all well-to-do. How can he have spent his share in that quiet place?"

"Gambling. The fool!—as if there weren't enough excitement in the business itself. He hasn't been buying securities—such as Japanese loans." Voogdt threw a sly glance sideways at Ward. "You may as well throw water into a sieve as expect that sort of chap to keep big money. He's just lost his head, and gambled. I'll bet you what you please that he hasn't a thousand pounds in the world, and that he owes more than that. That explains his desire to keep the business going—and explains some other things as well. Thieving, for instance."

Ward seemed inclined to doubt, but Pamily Brand insisted that Voogdt was right. It was evident that she had tried and condemned Cheyne, and now, like a woman, she wouldn't hear a word in his favor.

"OF COURSE he's a fool," she said, and then suddenly dragged me in as conclusive evidence. "Didn't he try to start stealing from his own friends and call you in as an accomplice?" she said, as though that settled the matter once for all.

She took me all aback.

"Me?" I said. "What do you mean?"

For once she sort of twinkled at me as though I were an old friend, but when I saw that Ward and Voogdt were laughing, I understood she was making a butt of me and it made me furious.

"Look here, Miss Brand," I said, getting up. "I'm at your table, and that makes it

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very difficult for me to say anything. All the same, you should remember I'm your guest, and stop your sneering for once. You've never treated me fairly. From the first you've always treated me like a fool—which I am, I dare say. I'm not as clever as you are, and when your cleverness leads to making people uncomfortable, I don't want to be. You sneer at me as Cheyne's accomplice. I never wanted to be. Ask Voogdt, there, whether I didn't want to punch his head at the very start of this thieving——"

"I knew it!" she cried. Her voice shook so that I thought I'd gone too far and frightened her. "I knew it. I c-could have sworn it." She turned to Voogdt. " 'Punch his head and write to Ward and expose the whole business.' Weren't those his very words?"

"Those very words, as far as I remember," Voogdt said. "If you'd been there you couldn't have reported them better."

I was standing with my hand on the back of my chair, ready to go. Her face I couldn't see while she was talking to Voogdt, but when she turned to me again she was smiling quietly and she spoke as pleasantly as if we were old friends.

"Sit down, Capt—Mr. West," she said. "You take my nonsense too seriously. Now I'll try and speak plainly so that you can't misunderstand me. When I laugh at you, remember it's a privilege I always claim toward people I consider my friends. Ask Leonard there whether I never tease him. When I said Willis was a fool in choosing you as an accomplice I didn't mean that you were stupid—though you are, to take fire at nothing—but that you were too honest for his purpose. He ought to have known that. I knew it, ever since that night you came to us at Terneuzen, tired out and wet through, poor dear.

"Another thing. I'm a woman and I mix much with other women, and clever quick-witted men who try to think and talk like women. And that means that they avoid the obvious—put the cart before the horse, so to speak. You don't, you sailors. Willis didn't. He just said what he meant, and it was a blessed change and I liked him for it. And you're the same, and I like you for it. You're honest and Willis is not, so I like you the better. And you've worked and risked your life in my—in our interests. Do you think I don't appreciate that? Surely you aren't going to deny me my privilege of making fun of you a little sometimes?"

"Sometimes? It's always," I said. "And I didn't understand it was just teasing. It seemed sneering to me."

"Please believe me, it never was," she said very seriously. "Come. Shake hands and sit down and be friends. I won't tease again if you don't like it."

That disarmed me.

"Tease as much as you like," I said, sitting down, as she told me. "As long as I know you're only teasing. I thought you were angry with me because I didn't like Cheyne."

"Well, now you know better, because I don't like him myself," she said shortly, as though dismissing an unpleasant subject. "Now, business. Anything further to lay before the meeting?"

VOOGDT plunged into the business at once as though to help change the subject.

"Our methods are too primitive," he said.

"You'll find it difficult to better them," Ward said briskly, and the two of them began a lively discussion.

I said nothing, and Pamily Brand very little for once. She sat listening, putting in a word now and then, and occasionally smiling round at me as though to reassure me of her good-will.

Voogdt got out several suggestions, more to make talk than anything else, I fancy, for Ward disposed of them easily enough. Primitive as the ballasting seemed, it was evidently the only practical method of removing the wolframite without arousing suspicion.

"But things are changed now," Voogdt insisted. "You haven't any object in deceiving your one crew any more. Surely that should permit of some safer way of doing business."

"Suggest one," was all Ward would say.

"What about packing it in bags labeled as fertilizer?"

"It would come to the ears of the Dutch farmers at Terneuzen. They'd try it, find it worthless and then begin to make inquiries as to our English market. No good. You dare not betray that it has any value until it's safe in our warehouses."

"It's losing stuff from English quaysides bothers me," Voogdt explained.

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"We've had to put up with it, and you'll have to do the same."

"Can't we take the bags aboard empty and fill them from the ballast in the hold when at sea?"

"That's not a bad notion," Pamily Brand cut in. She must have been listening keenly, for all her air of inattention.

Ward agreed, "Not a bad notion at all."

They appealed to me, and I said I thought we could bag some part of each cargo, though not all, as that would mean long delays at sea as well as considerable practical difficulty.

"Then we'll order the bags here to-morrow and you can get them aboard at once," Ward said.

"How long will they be making?" I asked.

"A couple of days or so. There's no such violent hurry for you to get away. A day or two of holiday won't hurt you."

That point settled, we all got up to go. Pamily Brand saw us to the door and shook hands all round, with me last.

"You won't be silly again, will you?" she said.

The others were going down the path toward the gate.

"You must forgive me for behaving like a fool," I said.

"I will," said she. "As a token of forgiveness you can call for me here to-morrow morning at eleven, and take me out. I want to do some shopping and you shall carry the parcels. A great privilege. Good night."

CHAPTER XXVII

SHOPPING WITH PAMILY

"PENNY!" said Miss Brand as we tramped through the March wind, a-shopping.

"For my thoughts, you mean? I thought I was walking too fast for you."

"What thoughts made you walk so fast?"

"I was thinking how you slapped my face and called me a fool when first we met."

"You were a fool, you know." She shook her head in deprecation. "And you certainly deserved to have your face slapped."

"For asking you to come for a walk with me? What are you doing at this minute?"

"It's different now, as you know very well. We're friends, aren't we? We weren't then, and I never imagined we should be."

"Why?"

"Why! Have you any idea how you looked? Filthy, unshaven—a drunken-looking wreck. You were a—a blot on the morning."

"Why did you trouble to come back and slang me, then?"

"Trouble?" She laughed—a little low chuckle. "It was a pleasure. I hate dirt and waste and slovenliness. I'll tell you. All the way across in that dirty little leaky boat my fingers were itching to brush the mud off your coat."

"Why should you take that much interest in me?"

"Oh! the eternal conceit of man! I didn't take any interest in you personally. It was your dirt I was interested in. Grubbiness always wakes me to an active interest in life. It makes me want to scrub, and dust, and bang things about, and set windows open. If you'd been clean—a nice, washed and shaven boatman—I shouldn't have taken any notice of you. See?"

"Don't I interest you now I'm cleaner?"

"Yes, as a friend, you do. I've enjoyed watching that dirty idle ruffian I found asleep on Exmouth beach turn into a self-respecting man. The wild lust to scrub you has departed, and now I want to see you go on and prosper. You're a friend, see? I've lots of friends and I like to see them do well."

"Um! Love for scrubbing? I think you'd look rather pretty with your head tied up in a duster, like a little Japanese housewife."

"Is that intended as a compliment?" she asked, with her eyes narrowing.

"Rather a back-handed one, isn't it, to tell a girl she looks her best when she's partly covered up?"

She laughed freely again.

"I wasn't sure. You mustn't use the word 'pretty' in that tone when you're talking to me, or else you'll find you're steering for another slapped face. I know just exactly how pretty I am. I see my looking-glass every day, and compliments are barred."

I didn't understand.

"D'you mean——" I began.

"I mean that I know the extent of my personal beauty," she said tartly. "I know my nose tips up the wrong way, and that I

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freckle. I hate silly compliments, because I know exactly how much they're worth. I've lived for years with Anne—with Miss Lavington—and nobody dares try flattering her. Whereas—— How is it a girl of my type can't talk for an hour to a man without the fool trying to stuff idiotic compliments down her throat? I suppose the magnanimous animal wants to console me because I ain't a beauty, like Anne."

She talked so simply and so entirely without affectation that I felt as though she were discussing some third person, and I answered her as impersonally.

"Your eyes are big and dark, and your mouth's very pretty——" I got out, and was going on when she stopped and faced me with her eyebrows level—almost scowling.

"You're asking for it," was all she said, but I dried up, for she looked vicious, and there we stood staring at each other. She seemed to expect some sort of apology, so I begged her pardon and said I was sorry.

"Though what for, goodness knows," I said. "I meant no harm."

WE HAD something to eat at a confectioner's, and I enjoyed it immensely, blessing Voogdt's notion of the fertilizer-sacks for keeping me ashore this day or two. She was bright and merry as you please, and I didn't feel constrained as I had at her table the night before. I got her to talk about things that interested her—the Woman's Suffrage business for one—and the more she talked the better I liked it.

Apart from the abstract question of the vote, it was amusing to hear her talk of her life and the women she worked with. She hadn't any very lofty ideas of women's ability, whatever she thought of their deserts. She had her own word for it. "Like trying to drive little pigs one way in an open field," she said with a twinkle, pleased at the simile. All through she spoke of other women with a sort of affectionate contempt, as though they were a lot of children playing at being grown-ups.

"Poor dears!" she said. "The poor, muddling dears! Listen to this, now. A woman speaker was sent to me at home, in Edgbaston, to stay the night, speak in Birmingham next day and then go on again to Rugby. She arrived at ten P.M. in a cab, with a small baby, a nurse and a trunk about as big as the cab itself. She'd mislaid my address, gone to a post-office to get a directory, listed all the Brands in Edgbaston and driven to each address in turn till she found me. While the baby was being put to bed, she argued with me about High Church services *versus* Low until the cabman sent in to know if he was to wait. Then she asked me to pay him—to charge it up against head-office, of course—and I did so. He said he'd been driving from place to place for over three hours, and the woman said vaguely that she thought that was about right. She seemed to think I was to blame for her losing the address."

"Poor kid," I said.

"Are you talking to me?" she demanded indignantly.

"Yes. I was referring to the woman's baby," I said. I had her that time, and she showed it by getting pink and stammering a little.

"Poor mite! It had slept all the time, the nurse said. She was a capable woman, fortunately."

"And the mother?"

"Oh, she was past praying for. She went off next day after attending her meeting, and left half her clothes lying about her room. I wasn't going to have that, so I just made a bundle of them and drove down to the station in the hope of catching her."

"Did you?"

"Did I not! She'd packed her purse in the trunk, and was turning out all its contents on the platform to find it, with the cabman waiting in the background. Her train was gone and she had forty minutes to wait for the next—a slow one."

"Do you want any more arguments against the suffrage-movement after that?" I asked.

"Don't be a fool. A thing is either right or wrong, no matter who pleads it. Not all the silly women's folly in the world can alter its essential justice. This woman was a dolt, of course, but so are many men. You don't want to disfranchise them."

"Men don't use hatpins and dog-whips," I said.

"Disfranchise them wholesale, and they'll use rifles and bayonets," she retorted. "There, I don't want to spoil our lunch by arguing."

"Good enough," I said. "I've finished. When I'm settled down and have a vote

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I'll use it for feminine suffrage. That's a promise!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

"WHAT DO THE GERMANS KNOW?"

NEXT morning we were up early and away before the turn of tide. The bags had come alongside the evening before, and with the help of the stevedore's men we had the lot aboard before midnight. I had got into the way of hating putting to sea of late, but somehow things looked brighter this morning than they had done for a long time. The day or two of holiday had done me good. There was a touch of Spring in the air. Once we heard a thrush whistling—halting notes, but sweet and clear—when we tacked close in to the north shore of the river.

Voogdt seemed to feel the influence, too. He was tending jib-sheets, a job which should have kept him fairly busy beating to windward in a narrow channel, but he found time to come aft and sit on the sky-light to fill a pipe.

"Nothing much wrong with this, is there?" he asked, loosening his neckerchief. "Summer's coming."

"And a good job, too. I don't want another Winter at this trade."

"I don't think you'll get another Winter of it. I shall reckon we're lucky if the job lasts us three months longer."

"Think so?"

"Something in my bones tells me so. How can it last? Our coming in was the beginning of the end. We've broken into a tight little family-syndicate, and all of 'em have relaxed precautions a bit. Here in Erith, Ward's been aboard constantly, when there were no business reasons for him to be. We've been calling for him at the hotel—dining with little Brand. I don't say any one's watching us, but if they were, what would they make of all this friendship between owners and employees? What should we have said, three months ago? Then there's Cheyne. How do we know what surprises he may have to spring on us next?"

"I don't care," I said. "If the bottom falls out of the whole business to-morrow, I'm better off than I ever was before. And after this life it'll be a comfort to get back to deep water again. No more slacking about out of collar for me."

"Same here," said he. "I've done right well. I'm sound in health, and I've got real money in the bank. But all the same, I can do with some more, and I don't intend Master Cheyne to spoil my game if I can help it. That's what I've been to London for."

"What have you been doing there?"

"Well, it's as well to be prepared for contingencies. In case the business looks like going pop all of a sudden, I mean. With help we might at the last moment snatch a big cargo, worth having. I've been seeing about getting that help, at a moment's notice, if required."

"How? You haven't been talking about the matter to strangers, have you?" I asked in surprise.

"Have I? Now is it likely? I've whipped up three of the most promising wasters in London, pitched them a yarn about the secret service, and they're just hungry to come in. I spun 'em a fairy-tale, all about spying on foreign coasts and a secret service mission disguised as a trading-station. Then I took 'em one by one to my diggings, finger on lip, so to speak, and showed 'em my sea-boots and guernsey and the scar on my leg. That did it. Every one of 'em was keen as mustard after that."

"You're mad!" I said.

"Not a bit of it. They won't ask questions—the secret service wheeze'll prevent that. And they'll be cheap labor, for they don't want pay, being already cursed with sufficient to live on and a bit over. They're just idling about London, bored to death and praying for a change. You don't know the breed."

"Not know wasters?"

"Not this sort, I fancy. You know the country remittance-man, who won't work, but these chaps are different. They'd like something to do, only, as I tell you, they're cursed with incomes and so drift into becoming just men about town. They all get sick of that after a year or two, and anything like excitement'll fetch 'em out of it quick enough. Hundreds of the breed went to South Africa—in fact I met two of my pals out there, one in the Yeomanry and t'other pretending to be a correspondent. The third was there, too, in a colonial regiment. He came into money after the war, and then came home and has been at a loose end ever since. Don't look so sour. I've been as prudent as you could wish.

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We may not want 'em at all, and if we don't we sha'n't hear any more of 'em. If we do, you'll find they'll come in very useful."

"JIB-SHEETS," I said, and kept him busy for a while, going about every few minutes, so that he hadn't any more time for chatter. I confess I felt very annoyed at his taking such an important step entirely off his own bat, without consulting Ward or myself.

Picking our way down the lower reaches and dodging the incoming traffic was really quite enough of a job to occupy all one's thoughts without wasting time talking. I ought to have kept my mind on my steering and nothing else, but Voogdt's mention of Cheyne had sent my thoughts round to Pamela Brand, and I kept wondering what she was up to now.

I suppose that made me a bit absent-minded, and I must have been slack and careless over my wheel. I thought of her pretty neck at dinner the night before, and of the friendly way her eyes twinkled when she was pleased, until a violent shouting almost over my head, and Voogdt's startled face as he looked back at me, woke me to the fact that we were right in the track of a collier, outward-bound, and that she was drifting down on us with her engines stopped, hooting furiously.

I should have got out of her way at once if her mate hadn't annoyed me. He was leaning over the fo'castle rail, cursing, and when he saw I was taking notice of him he got personal.

"Are y' in love, bargee?" he roared. The lookout man beside him sniggered, a sort of duty laugh, and Voogdt turned his back, suddenly becoming very engrossed in his work.

That made me wild, and I lost my temper, I think. The grinning pair of fools! Being hot and angry and rather at a loss as to what to say, I perpetrated a chestnut I wouldn't have condescended to remember in the ordinary course of things.

"You the mate?" I asked.

"A sure thing I am," he said.

"Then go and talk to your equals. I'm master of this craft."

That finished him. To have that hoary-headed old wheeze flung at him—and him in an earnest hurry, too—was more than he could bear. He went aft without a word, and in a minute or two the collier began to drop astern a little. Then she got under way again and tried to pass me, but every time she came up I went about and crossed her bows, and she had to stop again. Once or twice it was so near a thing that she had to go astern. Then her skipper actually did come forward to talk to me.

I'd had enough of the joke by then and would have let her pass if he'd been evil. But he wasn't, and so I kept them stopping and going astern, and cursing fit to split for a good four miles farther. They brought lumps of coal on the fo'castle-head at last and pelted us every time we passed under their bows, but they never hit either of us once, and we were well past Tilbury before they had room to get by.

I shouldn't have played the fool like that if I hadn't been annoyed with them. As it was I felt I'd got square with that mate and, the wind taking a slant more northerly just as the river widened, I called Voogdt to the wheel and went below and got breakfast whistling, very pleased with myself.

WE HELD the slant till the Kentish Knock was abeam and then the wind went round to the west of north, and we had a straight run across, never touching a sheet. Cheyne was a bit fretful when we met. Terneuzen in Winter wasn't a comfortable shop at the best of times and, being anxious to get the promised consignment of wolframite into his customer's hands, he was more irritable than usual at every delay. Why had we been so long at Erith? What were these rotten fertilizer-bags for?

He snapped and snarled and grumbled at everything, till I felt ready to kick him. Voogdt took him in hand, smoothed him down, had grub with him, went about with an arm around his neck, so to speak, and soon had him in a more trustful mood again. By the second evening he was quite all right and asked us both to join him at dinner.

"Make a four," said he, "and have a four-handed game of billiards afterward."

"Who's the fourth?" I asked.

"Van Noppen, the German manager. A decent chap, that."

Here was a shock, if you like. I recalled the last time I had seen Van Noppen, when he was full of explanations about his man's precious gun-accident, and now we two—

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skipper and coasting-hand—were to sit at dinner with our betters. I should have started questions at once but for a warning glance from Voogdt, who accepted the invitation for both of us and then adroitly turned the subject to the proposed theft which Cheyne was arranging at Brest.

When he had gone ashore we looked at each other, aghast.

"What the deuce——" we both began, and then stopped together.

"What is the fool playing at?" I asked.

Voogdt shook his head and got off a Latin tag about the gods first depriving of reason those they meant to destroy.

"What is it little Miss Chattermag says? 'Dropping into proverbs is a sign of failing intellect.' That's me. This thing beats all. Has that fool taken Van Noppen into partnership already or only paved the way for it?"

"What are we to do?"

"We must feed with them, that's certain. We can't get out of it without exciting suspicion, now. But it'll be a gay party, by the look of it. We don't know how much Van Noppen knows, nor what he thinks of us. That's the hitch, really. What can he think? It would look funny to an outsider, if 'twas only Cheyne and yourself dining together. But when I'm included—me, a mere coasting-hand. . . . How on earth can you smear that over to make it look natural?"

"No good asking me," said I. "I can't help you."

"I'll ask Cheyne," he said, and off he went ashore at once.

When he got back he still looked anxious.

"I can't get any sense out of the fool. All he says is that Van Noppen knows we're his friends and that, as he's a guest, he'll be civil. I asked him what the man would think of his having coasting-hands at table, and he said he wouldn't understand there was anything unusual in that, being a foreigner. A foreigner! Pah! I'm going to turn in and think hard."

"Thought of anything?" I asked when he reappeared at tea-time.

"Nothing. I can't make head or tail of it. What was it I said to you in London River about the beginning of the end? All we can do is to behave as we did before and keep our eyes and ears open. You're still the coasting-skipper, and I'm the cockney hand. That's all. And tread gingerly, Jem, whatever you do. We shall have a critical audience to play to. Try and get him on to drink with you. I hadn't better presume so far myself, I suppose?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE INTRIGUE OF LAUGHTER

WE MIGHT have spared ourselves the trouble of such preparations. The dinner was laid in a small back room of the hotel we always used—the hotel by the locks—and Cheyne and Van Noppen were waiting for us together when we entered the stuffy apartment. They greeted us noisily, Cheyne half drunk, and the German not much better. So far from Van Noppen objecting to Voogdt's company, he slapped him on the back and invited him to drink immediately on our arrival.

Voogdt touched his cap, after the manner of the lowly coaster, drank the proffered glass with a "Best respecks, gen'lemen," and then stepped outside for a few moments. When he returned he was wiping his mouth, and under his arm was a box of vile cigars which he opened and placed upon the table for common consumption. A certain recklessness in his air that I hadn't noticed before made me anxious even then, at the very start. Lucky Cheyne was drunk enough not to notice Voogdt had dropped into pure Cockneyse as of old.

When dinner began I thought he'd gone mad. It was no surprise to me that Cheyne should drink spirits, or that Van Noppen, who had elected to take beer, should help it out by a bottle of schnapps at his elbow, which he drank German fashion, neat in a liqueur-glass. But it scared me when Voogdt said that was a fine notion.

"On'y I don't like this 'ere schnapps much, guv'nor. I'll 'ave whisky, same way." A bottle was brought in to his order and he set about it like a dipsomaniac. As for me, half dazed by the noise they made, and worrying about his behavior, I had a bottle of light wine and sat wondering what on earth would happen next, with those three madmen carrying on like that.

By the time dinner was half over they were all flushed and talking one against the other. Voogdt still kept up some pretence of being a coasting-hand, but once he contradicted Cheyne flatly, and Cheyne, with his eyes wet and bright, only laughed at

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the insolence and called him "old chap" in replying. Van Noppen praised him incoherently for his forbearance.

"It is goodness to be friends all," was his way of putting it. "At work—'master —sir.' Yass, all right. But with work done, drink a glass of beer brotherly. Eh?"

He was appealing to me.

"A glass of beer," I said, accenting "glass" and "beer," for he was drinking spirits in bulk.

"Or two. Three." He poured out and emptied another glass of neat Schiedam. "You drink Sauterne, Captain? No good, that. Cold veat'er, drink schnapps."

"Or whisky," said Voogdt, and suited the action to the word.

"Graves 'll do for me," I said sulkily.

I'd never dreamed that Voogdt had this weakness, and I felt sick and sorry It wasn't so much the danger of exposure—though I saw that was imminent, with those fools drinking as they were. It was Voogdt himself I was sorry for. I'd often wondered whether his weak lung had been the sole reason for his going on tramp. But here was reason enough, if this was his idea of conviviality. The man was a drunkard, and I'd never discovered it till now.

By the time the last plates were cleared —the little Dutch waitress staring at us, half afraid, and keeping on my side of the table all she could—all three of them were half-seas-over. Billiards? They couldn't have stood up, leave alone hold a cue. Disgusted, I got up to go. Van Noppen and Voogdt shouted protests, but Cheyne was too far gone even for that. His head was sinking on the table as I moved toward the door, dodging the other two men when they staggered to their feet to try and stop me. By going I would spoil a merry party, they insisted, and therefore I must stay.

I WAS in the hall, cap in hand, saying good night to the landlady, when the door reopened behind me and Voogdt lurched out. He caught me by the arm and in a drunken tangle of Dutch, German and English began trying to persuade me not to go. I snatched my sleeve from him, opened the hotel door, and was out in the night without answering him, when he made another lurch and stumbled after me.

"Stop and see it out, you born fool," he said in a sober vicious whisper. "I'm drinking cold tea;" and before I'd got the sense of the words into my head he had relapsed again.

"I'm aw right," he insisted loudly, as if I had tried to get him away. "Le's go back an' 'ave another. I'm aw right, I tell yer. Aw right. Where's my ol' pal, Van Noppen?"

He was just behind us, having followed Voogdt into the hall. He also was evidently very drunk, his fair hair hanging in straight locks over his forehead and his collar unfastened at one side: but he was quiet, and quite ready to go back and resume the fuddling. Voogdt wriggled himself free of my hold and stood swaying, and then, embracing Van Noppen, the pair went back to the sitting-room again, where I followed them with my brain in a whirl.

Cheyne had gone to sleep in his chair, his arms out across the table and his head upon them, snoring heavily. A candlestick, upset by his elbow, was still fuming, its wick spluttering and stinking in a pool of grease upon the table-cloth. Van Noppen extinguished it with the bottom of an empty tumbler—and now that my dull wits were waking I noticed he did it without a slip or lurch—and then shook Cheyne by the arm, shouting in his ear:

"Wake oop," he cried. "Wake oop an' 'ave anot'er."

Cheyne opened his eyes and looked up, utterly unconscious of his surroundings. Any one could see that. He emptied the glass Van Noppen held to his lips, and looked around at us, his eyes set and stupid, with no trace of recognition in them, his head lolling from side to side.

" 'Ave another, you chaps," he muttered, and collapsed again, snoring and gurgling in his throat.

Van Noppen remained stooping over him, listening to the noises he made, for perhaps half a minute. Watching him from behind I could see, now that my suspicions were aroused, that his attitude was intent and alert, not in the least the attitude of a drunken man. Quick as I could I dipped a finger in his glass of schnapps and put it in my mouth, and it was tasteless—only water!

Voogdt, watching me, lifted one eyebrow drunkenly, and quicker than it takes to tell I made an H with my hands in deaf-and-dumb language, then held up two fingers, and then made an O, as before. Even

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as I did it the thought struck me that H_2O something resembled WO_2, and wondered if he'd understand.

But he did — trust him — and nodded drunkenly, babbling something to Van Noppen about sitting down and " 'aving another."

Then, at last, I saw how things stood. Underneath all this noise and folly a duel of wits was going on between Voogdt and Van Noppen. Cheyne and myself had been equally out of it and, Cheyne being now out of action altogether, it was up to me to bear a hand.

I had scarcely made up my mind what to do when Van Noppen rose erect, having satisfied himself, I suppose, that Cheyne need no longer be taken into account. He played his part as before, and I took advantage of it as best I could, getting in his way and letting him knock me sideways with his first lurch. As I staggered I caught at the table as if to support myself —and his bottle of water was smashed on the floor.

"BE MORE careful," I said, as though angry at his clumsiness. Voogdt took no more notice than to laugh vacantly, and proffer a drink from his own bottle. He dared that, when acceptance would have meant instant discovery!

But so far we were evidently to windward of Van Noppen. I was strung up to real interest in the game by that time, and it was rich to watch Voogdt pressing him to share the alleged whisky, and his guarded refusals.

"Whisky on schnapps? No goot," he said, and pretended to hiccup. Oh, he played his game well, too, past denying. He wanted to fetch another bottle of schnapps, but here I interfered again. I wouldn't let him get it. Both he and Voogdt had had enough, I said, and Voogdt was to come aboard with me.

He refused flatly. He didn't care a curse for me or anybody else, and he was going to stay with his old pals and make a night of it. Why wouldn't I stay and be jolly? Van Noppen joined him in drunken persuasions, and eventually I consented with as ill a grace as I could manage. As I'd smashed his bottle I supposed I must pay for another, and before he could offer to fetch it, I'd rung the bell. And when it came in I had the first drink. It was schnapps this time, all right.

I'd drunk with Germans before, and I knew we should whack him when it came to spirits. They're accustomed to light beer, but they're a temperate people, else. He'd had a fair amount of beer already—beer and water alternately—and I'd had the best part of a bottle of Graves, so we started about level; and now I knew I could rely on Voogdt, I didn't worry so much about myself.

We both kept him at it as hard as we could, and by midnight he was as nearly drunk as ever I've seen a man. My head was humming a bit, and I wanted to talk, but I had the sense to keep off business-topics. As for Voogdt, he looked awful—sprawling all over the table, and singing and shouting by turns.

At the last, Van Noppen said we could see him part way home—as far as the *Luck and Charity*—but Voogdt refused.

"I ain't goin' t' risk my life on them 'mbankmen's t'-night," he announced, with an attempt at sobriety. "I know when I've 'ad my whack. I sh' sleep 'ere. You better, too, guv'nor."

"I'm going aboard," I said.

"No. Sleep 'ere. All sleep 'ere. Don' wan' a Dutch crowner's inquest in th' morin'. Nasty 'marks passed about condition, leavin' th' pub night afore. All stay."

Van Noppen agreed, though he had seemed inclined to come with me when I said I should go, and we ordered four rooms. After a bit of horse-play between Voogdt and Van Noppen, in which more tumblers were smashed, we dragged Cheyne upstairs and put him to bed, after a fashion, and then Voogdt insisted on seeing me in bed, too.

"Ol' rascal!" he said, leering. "Keep an eye on 'im, we must."

They both stayed in my room till I had turned in, by which time Voogdt was asleep in a chair. Van Noppen stirred him up and, got him outside the room, and by an altercation in the passage I judged he was insisting on seeing Van Noppen in bed too.

" 'Nother ol' rascal," I heard him say, and finally they went off together.

I was just dozing off to sleep, angry at having wasted an evening, and puzzled to death wondering what on earth Voogdt thought he was playing at, when my door

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opened very softly, and his voice called me in a whisper. I was out of bed and at the door in a moment.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Dress, and drink a drop of this."

He pushed a small square bottle into my hands and was gone as silently as he had entered. I pulled out the cork in the dark, smelled a pungent familiar odor and took a draught as he had ordered.

I thought I was killed! The stuff caught me in the throat, burning, so that my eyes stuck out and ran with tears, and cold sweat broke out on my temples. Thinking he'd gone mad and poisoned me, I struck a light with shaking hands, and found the poison was nothing worse than Worcestershire sauce. Then I saw what he was at. I took a sip or two, more gingerly, and it pulled me together somewhat. Then I shuffled on my still warm clothes again, blew out the light and sat down in a chair to await events.

CHAPTER XXX

NIGHT-STILLNESS AND A THEFT

THE house sank to stillness and quiet, only broken by a faint growl of voices —Voogdt talking in Van Noppen's room, I supposed—and soon even that monotone ceased altogether. After the silly riot and noise of the evening the silence seemed ominous and depressing instead of restful. I felt rotten, tired, my head beginning to ache, a vile taste in my mouth. The window being open, I crept to it, stocking-footed, and put my head out to breathe the cold night air, hoping it would freshen me up a bit.

The room was on the first floor, the window facing the sleeping village under the embankment, and the night being clear—though very dark, with heavy clouds hanging low and a slight drizzle falling—streaks and spots of light showed here and there through chinks in cottage window-shutters like gold specks on black velvet. It was very still, and the little town was silent as the grave, and but for the sparks of light very near as dark. As I knelt by the sill, one o'clock struck from the church spire, and in the stillness the stroke of the bell was like an actual blow upon my aching, head. Wheezy Dutch clocks in the houses and down-stairs in the hotel took up the tale, till all the night seemed full of the buzzing and ringing. It echoed in my tired brain long after the last of them had subsided into silence.

My head fell forward on my arms, and I was nearly asleep when the door opened again behind me.

"That you, Austin?"

Though I whispered low, he slid a hand over my mouth before leaning out of the window beside me to peer into the darkness below. I looked, too, but could see nothing, strain my eyes as I would. Nor, I believe, could he, but making no more delay he took my hand in his, and made me feel that his boots were tied around his neck, and then pushed a leg over the sill and began to wriggle out after it holding tightly to my wrists. When his shoulders were level with the sill he stopped as though he had found foothold, felt with his feet for a moment and then let go my hands and stooped out of sight.

In a few seconds his head rose again.

"Roof," he breathed almost inaudibly in my ear. "Come."

I only stopped to lock the door and then picked up my boots and slid after him.

Some cook-house or scullery had been built out from the back of the hotel, and its roof came exactly under my window. To slide from that to the ground was easy enough, and in less than a minute we had crept round the corner of the hotel and were crossing the lock-gates. Through my stockings I could feel their smooth woodwork wet and cold.

MY TEETH were chattering when we reached the opposite bank, and sat down in the muddy roadway to put on our boots.

"What are you up to?" I asked Voogdt angrily.

"Visit of inspection to the German sheds," he whispered. "Van Noppen's asleep and snoring. I put in a quarter of an hour lying on the passage-floor outside his room to make sure. We sha'n't get such a chance again. Come along."

"Which way are you going?"

"Inland and across the fields."

I followed him, scrambling down inside the embankment and knee-deep through the ditch beside it, and we set off at a jog-trot across the muddy pastures.

"Run," said he. "That'll warm us," and

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we ran as best we could, slipping and sliding at almost every other step.

Even at the start I think I must have been too far-gone for running to warm me. I only got out of breath, and had to stop and blow, again and again, feeling colder than ever. The grass was wet and slippery, the drizzle was increasing to a steady downpour, and to make matters worse the fields were divided by ditches in place of hedges and, as we couldn't jump them in the dark, we were constantly having to wade, generally knee-deep, and once as high as the waist.

I don't remember ever feeling so washed out, exhausted and wretched.

As far as we could judge, we kept a course parallel with the embankment, and at last were rewarded by catching sight of a vaguely outlined hummock that must have been one of our store-sheds by the wharf. Then Voogdt ceased running and advanced more cautiously while I followed stupidly at his heels, too tired even to feel curious about what we should do when we got to the German settlement.

We must have been about half-way from our wharf to theirs when suddenly he stopped dead in his tracks. My eyes were growing more accustomed to the darkness and I could make out that he held up a hand as though to enjoin silence.

"Hear that?" he whispered.

I listened, but at first could hear nothing but the steady hiss of the falling rain. Then I became aware of a sound which obtruded itself on the hearing—a sound quite foreign to soft, muddy pastures. It was a crisp clinking sound, apparently coming from the top of the embankment, and it alternated with a harsh scraping as of stone on iron.

"Hear that?" he whispered again.

"Somebody shoveling stones," I mumbled.

"I believe you're right. Stay here."

He disappeared in the darkness and left me standing alone, my head nodding on my breast, half stupefied. The clicking continued, and once I thought I heard men's voices. Before I was sure—indeed, I was past being sure of anything, beyond that I would have given ten years of life to be allowed to fall asleep before a fire—Voogdt was back at my side.

"Come on," he said, and we set off again in the same direction as before.

Slipping about on the mud behind him, it seemed years—and actually was, I suppose, a quarter of an hour—before we found ourselves scrambling over newly broken ground heaped up into a shallow embankment. Here the mud, bare of grass, was worse than ever, and it was difficult even to stand upright. Once I fell on all fours, but Voogdt dragged me to my feet, and in another moment we were sliding down the other side of the embankment and sidling our way along a wall that felt as though it were made of plaited rope.

By now I was past wondering even at this, only thinking dully that my fingers must be paralyzed with cold. When we came to the end of the wall we were standing under the river-embankment and looking up at the sheds upon it. They were plainly visible against the sky, owing, I suppose, to some faint reflected light from the water on the other side.

Here Voogdt took me by the shoulders and shook me.

"Pull yourself together," he whispered angrily.

"I'm nearly gone in," I said. "That wall felt just like ropes."

"It was rope, you fool. Explosive-screens. You're all right. I'm going to chance it and see if I can get into those sheds up there. Can—will you come?"

"I'll try," I said.

He dropped on all fours, and we crawled up the embankment one behind another, like a pair of otters.

I HAVE only the faintest recollection of what happened after that. Looking back it all seems like a drunkard's dream, sometimes startlingly vivid and sometimes a blank. I remember seeing Voogdt's head from behind peering round an open doorway against a dim-lit interior, but how he got the door open I have no idea. I must have followed him in, but I have no recollection of it.

I remember sitting in a comfortable chair in a clean, neat room with varnished deal walls lit by one lamp, turned very low, and drinking a glass of Schiedam that he handed me and being very sick after it, and I remember seeing muddy stains from my fingers on the glass. There was a big roll-top desk against one wall and Voogdt must have broken into it while I was being sick, for I watched him stupidly as he pulled open

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drawer after drawer, stuffing papers into his coat-pockets. I remember a large brass telescope fixed on a heavy stand and staring blindly at the boarded wall, and wondering why it wasn't at a window, until I noticed that all the windows in the room were above the level of one's head.

Then I gave up that problem. There were some coils of insulated wire in a corner of the room, and one or two large glass accumulators and, after wondering what they were for, I soon gave that up as incomprehensible, too.

And the next thing I remember is being back in the *Luck and Charity*, the stove burning almost red-hot, and Voogdt plying me with hot tea, and helping me out of my wet and dirty clothes. His face was white and drawn, and he was to the full as filthy as myself. Then comes a longer blank, and I remember nothing more until I woke to find Voogdt shaking me and trying to drag me out of my bunk. It was still dark, and I had a hazy idea that I'd slept the clock round.

"Let me be," I begged him.

"I daren't, Jem. We've got to be back in our rooms at the hotel before daylight, and it's four now. We must, man. It pretty well means life or death to us."

"I'm aching all over," I grumbled.

"I'm no better. You've had an hour's sleep. I've had none. Come out of it. Here are dry underclothes, your next best serge and clean boots. If we get away quickly and wear our overcoats he may not notice we've changed. Perhaps he won't see us, even."

"Who?"

"Van Noppen, of course. Hurry! Hurry, I tell you!"

I got into the clothes somehow and we staggered ashore and toward Terneuzen. Dawn was almost breaking, but it was still pretty dark and raining heavier than ever, so no one was about. Even the pilot-house was closed, and only a wisp of smoke from its chimney showed that it wasn't deserted altogether.

That climb on the cook-house roof about finished me. I dragged off my coat and boots and fell on the bed with all the rest of my clothes on, utterly gone in. As to Voogdt, I don't know what became of him. I must have been asleep before he left the room.

When he woke me again, Van Noppen was with him, and I pulled the clothes up to my chin for fear he should see I was half dressed. Voogdt saw the movement and edged a little closer to the bed in case the German should start any horse-play like pulling off the blankets.

"Halloo, Captain," Van Noppen greeted me. "Elefen o'clock. . . . How is your het?"

"Awful!" I said.

I turned on the pillow as though to avoid the light, and groaned aloud.

"Haf a branty an' soda."

He had a glass of the beastly stuff ready in his hand.

"I'd rather have a cup of tea."

"Right - o, skipper," said Voogdt, and rang to order one.

"How's Cheyne?" I asked.

"Mr. Cheyne, 'e ain't very well this mornin'. Late howers, they don't agree wiv 'im. 'E's 'ad two brandies an' sodas a'ready—an' 'e looked like wantin' 'em."

"And you?"

"Ow, I'm aw right."

He was pale as death, utterly washed out and wearied, his eyes hollow and dark with exhaustion, but he protested cheerfully,

"I'm aw right, skipper. Not azackly in the pink, per'aps, but you cawn't 'ave sprees wivout payin' for 'em, can yer?"

"I suppose not," I said, as the tea arrived. "Now give me that cup and clear out. I'm going to dress."

Breakfast was the final ordeal. All four of us were wrecks, to all appearance suffering from the same complaint. Either Cheyne or Voogdt would have served a teetotal lecturer as a Terrible Example, and I must have looked every whit as bad as either of them. Van Noppen, with German neatness, had made some attempt to brush his hair and tidy himself generally, but his eyes were a beautiful shade of rose-pink and his manner was distinctly depressed. Very likely he was reflecting that his plans for the previous evening had miscarried somewhat.

Not one of us had shaved, and taken in the lump we must have made a very pretty picture of a Drunkards' Quartette. But while Cheyne and Van Noppen had no appetites whatever, Voogdt and myself were ravenously hungry, and it was maddening to be compelled to pass one savory-smelling dish after another and content ourselves with dry bread and coffee.

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CHAPTER XXXI

VOOGDT'S SECRET MISSION

BUT we did it, somehow, and got away to the *Luck and Charity* just after midday. Van Noppen came with us, leaving us at our wharf and walking on homeward down the embankment. Before he had gone a hundred yards we were down below, standing at the cabin-table eating cold meat and bread with our fingers, and watching his receding figure through the open skylight.

"He's got a surprise waiting for him," said Voogdt with his mouth full.

"What did you do down there? I was past taking notice."

"You were. I never thought you'd collapse like that, Jem. What was the matter with you?"

"Drink, man. I let myself go, sewing up that chap. How was I to know you had this jaunt in view?"

"I couldn't well tell you, could I? I wonder if 'Kiah heard us come aboard? We must find that out, among other things. . . . Oh! I am tired, Jem! And there's tons to do before I can sleep."

"What's to do?"

"Our clothes to clean; papers to read and burn; our best boots to be burnt or sunk in midstream. We've left tracks in that mud down there, for certain."

"I'll do all that. You turn in."

"Dare I? . . . Yes, I will. It'll be an hour or two before Van Noppen decides what to do next. But take care what you're about. We're watched all the time—that telescope——"

"I remember seeing that. But seems to me it was clamped down facing a dead wall."

"Pointing dead at us here, though. The board in front of it was loose, and for certain it's screened from view outside. Where's my glasses?" He put them to the open skylight and stared through them for half a minute. "Here, look," he said at last, handing them to me. "That's the room we were in, the second shed from here."

I remembered it well—remembered describing it to Cheyne when first the sheds were built. The glasses brought it near, and showed a pile of boards heaped carelessly against its hither side.

"I see some deals leaning against the shed," I told him.

"Yes." He was getting into his bunk. "They're there to screen the hole in the wall. Van Noppen can watch us from between them to his heart's content."

"Sure?" I said doubtfully.

Even with my mind full of our crazy night's expedition, the idea sounded fantastic.

Voogdt swore at me aloud. Exhausted as he was, I suppose his temper was thin.

"You're the most thick-headed fool I ever met," he said angrily. "What are they there for else? D'ye ever hear of any sane man storing deals on their ends out of doors in damp Winter weather? They'd warp out of true after a single day of such treatment. You know they would. But I'm too done up to argue with you now. Here's Van Noppen's correspondence under my pillow, and I'm going to sleep. You mount guard, and don't you let a soul put foot into this cabin until I give you leave. Wake me if any one comes this way from the German sheds, and don't forget you're being watched all the time."

HE PULLED the blankets over him and I went on deck and had a chat with 'Kiah. He made no mention of anything unusual happening during the night, so it was evident he hadn't heard us come aboard, which was fortunate for once, though it gave me misgivings as to his value as a night-watchman. However, I couldn't remember his having been left alone in the same way before, so that probably his heavy slumbers hadn't harmed us as yet.

Bearing the telescope in mind, I didn't pay any attention openly to the German sheds, only glancing down there from time to time out of the corner of my eye to see if anything was doing. A barge was being loaded at their wharf, men going to and fro between the boat and sheds, but there was nothing unusual about that. Van Noppen was invisible—watching us, perhaps, though more likely he was sitting indoors scratching his head over the state of his living-room. As for us, we had nearly all our ballast aboard, and when the tide cleared the banks I went below, intending to wake Voogdt and ask instructions.

He was out of bed, sitting before the

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little stove, reading and burning the stolen papers one by one.

"Anything interesting?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Not a thing. Nothing but *bona-fide* business estimates and orders. Looks as if we hadn't done much good by our jaunt."

"What did you expect?"

"I don't know. But I'll tell you one thing I didn't expect, and that was to find the place deserted and Van Noppen's men all out road-mending at half-past one A.M. of a dirty night."

"That scraping and clicking, do you mean?"

"Just that. I got as close as I dared, and it looked like road-mending, as far as I could make out. There were three men and they seemed to be emptying buckets of broken stone or gravel on the embankment, leveling it with shovels and trampling it in. Funny, ain't it? We must have a look at that, but hang me if I know how to manage it, with their telescope on us all day, and the men themselves there after dark."

"Meanwhile, what are we to do? Go on with the ballasting?"

"Of course. We must stick to our usual routine, now of all times. They mustn't notice anything. But we mustn't sail to-night, unless you can leave me behind. . . Can you and 'Kiah get her across to Erith without me, think?"

"If it's necessary, I dare say we can. Weather seems to promise fair enough."

"Then that's what we'll do. We'll get away to-night and you shall put me ashore down river, somewhere between here and Flushing. I must be here on the spot for a bit. Cheyne's worse than useless, and I'm getting nervous."

"What about?"

"Well—I'll tell you. Did you notice any electrical apparatus down there last night?"

"Some glass cells and coils of wire? Yes, I did. In the corner, between the telescope and the desk."

"That's right. That's what I'm nervous about."

"Why?"

"I can't understand it—and, as you ought to know by now, when I can't understand things they worry me to death. And the road-mending, too. . . . No, there's more than buying and selling dynamite going on down there, and I must get at it, or——"

"Or what?"

"Ah! That's what I'd like to know," said he. "No good talking any more about it. Come up and get this ballast aboard, and off we go."

We worked till dusk fell, got the hatches on, and began to wait for tide. Voogdt was so nervous, walking up and down and peering into the growing darkness, that he infected me, but I knew questions would only bother him and went about the usual business of getting ready for sea.

He only spoke once, and then it was in a low tone.

"Bet you what you please Van Noppen's here before we cast off," he said. "And what's more, he'll make sure we're all three aboard when we sail."

"Think so?"

"I SHALL be disappointed in him if he doesn't," said he and, even as he spoke, Van Noppen's voice hailed us from the embankment.

"Sailin' to-night, Captain?" he called.

"In an hour's time," I shouted back.

"Ah! Shall I come aboard?"

"You're very welcome," I said. "Sorry we can't offer you a drink, but this is a dry ship."

"Dat's all right," he said cheerfully.

But instead of coming aboard he sat down on a bollard at the wharf-side and lit a cigarette. Anybody would have thought he had come after a drink, and stayed ashore because we couldn't give him one. But as all three of us were on deck, Voogdt's conjecture wasn't impossible, either.

Cheyne came down shortly after, and the two of them were walking up and down the little wharf when we left. Even after they were out of sight in the darkness their voices came together across the water to wish us fair weather and a good voyage.

Voogdt went below to pack as soon as we were well away, and I went to interview 'Kiah at the wheel. It was impossible to put Voogdt ashore without his knowledge, and for the first time we had to take the risk of letting him see a departure from our usual routine. I gave him no explanations, only telling him he was to land Voogdt in the dingey at Hoogplaat, a village on the south side of the river about six or seven miles before we came to Flushing, and, further, that he was to hold his tongue about it.

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He asked plenty of questions, of course.

" 'Ave 'e been doin' anything?" he inquired curiously.

"What do you mean?"

"Well—up there? Up to pub?" He jerked his head over his shoulder. "I heerd there was a bit of a barney when you was up there, night 'fore last."

Nothing was more natural than that he should think Voogdt had got drunk and come into collision with the police, and he couldn't have got any idea into his thick head that would have served our purpose better.

I winked at him by the light of the binnacle-lamp.

"Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies," I said very knowingly. "If you don't know, you can't tell, can you? You put him ashore quietly, and if anybody wants to know where he is you can say you don't know—and that'll be the truth."

'Kiah, full of delight at being admitted to a part in such high intrigue, winked back at me, gave over the wheel into my charge and got the dingey alongside with the air of a conspirator.

After dropping anchor in midstream, I went below and found Voogdt sitting at the cabin-table writing letters. He was still in his filthy working-clothes, but had another suit and some belongings tied up in a parcel of sail-cloth.

"All ready?" I asked.

"In half a minutè."

He went on writing for a while until he had licked and addressed the last of his envelopes. For a moment he sat looking at them, chin on hand, and then turned to me.

"SIT down, Jem. I want a talk with you. I've been thinking out arrangements. . . . If you want to write me, address Post-Office, Ghent. I'll have my letters fetched from there daily. Date, but don't sign your letters, and don't head them with any address—nothing but the date. Be as non-committal as possible, but never fail to let me know date, place and destination of every sailing from English ports. I shall report myself to you to the same address every other day. If I don't, there's something wrong, and you must come and look for me."

"Where?" I asked, with new misgivings at his earnestness.

"Down at the German sheds. I shall be thereabouts, dead or alive. Don't look so scared, man. I take a bit of killing."

"I won't have it," I cried. "D'you think I'm going to leave you like this?"

"Don't be an ass. You're doing your share of the work and I'm doing mine. I'm giving orders and you must obey them."

"I won't. Let's chuck the whole job, Austin. We've got enough out of it, by now."

He put his hand on my shoulder, looking very serious.

"Old man," he said. "Believe me, we can't chuck it. Unless I'm mistaken it's more serious than we've thought up to now. For a lark I told those fellows in London that if I wanted them it was for a secret service job, and I'll tell you the same thing now in all seriousness.

"I've nothing more definite to go on now than I had then, but on my honor I believe that that German explosive-company is no more a trading-company than we are. But they're better men than we. They aren't out for private gain—they're working for national ends, I'll swear, and it's up to us to do the same. So you must sail the *Luck and Charity* across and leave me here. Tell Ward all this if you see him, but don't write letters and don't breathe a word to a single soul else."

"You're risking your life," I said.

"And so are you. If these people are what I think, then your life's in danger as much as mine—and has been all along. It may be worth their while at any moment to have you run down or blown out of the water, and if it is they'll do it. Be sure of that. But, man, all's risk at sea—or ashore either, for that matter. How would you rather finish: in a sudden and interesting scuffle, or in a wreck, helping do this job for the benefit of the little island over across there, or in a bed at home? . . . There! Enough said! I've got action and risk, you the same risk with inaction. Mine's the more sporting job of the two, isn't it?"

He laughed straight into my eyes. Going off like that, to risk his life on beastly mud-flats in the dark, he laughed like a schoolboy going out to play. I couldn't say anything to him; couldn't speak, even.

"Now, here's your final orders. The minute you get to Erith, stamp and post these three letters. They're to my crew. You won't mind their coming now, will you?

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They'll report themselves within twelve hours of hearing from you. And I think that's all. All correspondence with me *via* Ghent post-office, remember. Good-by, old man. Good luck."

He shouldered his bundle, ran up the companion, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXXII

A WASTER O' LONDON-TOWN SHIPS FOR ADVENTURE

THAT was a trip, that crossing. I don't ever remember a more miserable time in all my life. The weather was fine, and the wind fair, but light and fluky, so that we drifted rather than sailed from Flushing as far as the Girdler Light. And all the time I was dancing mad with impatience to get to Ward and set a better brain than my own working on Voogdt's behalf.

There was next to nothing to do aboard, and I spent the trip tramping up and down our tiny deck, thinking, thinking, thinking of Voogdt out alone on those beastly mud-flats till my head ached.

If I had left him in a hill-country with some cover about, I don't think I should have felt so bad about it. But, with the feeling of helplessness I'd experienced on that slippery, sliding jaunt still in my mind, it seemed to me there wasn't a dry place for him to hide in, in all West Flanders.

'Kiah made it worse. He was one perpetual covert snicker at the idea of helping dodge the Dutch police, and went about his work more cheerfully than usual. Once or twice he even winked at me when I relieved him at the wheel, but he soon dropped that when he saw how I scowled back at him. The idiot made me mad enough to want to smash his silly grinning face for him. There was he, as pleased as a dog with two tails, laughing to himself to think what a smart fine chap he was, and carrying a face like a Summer morning, while I was stamping up and down deck, whistling for a wind, mad to get to Erith for news, and making a poor job of trying to conceal my anxiety.

I never for a moment doubted that it was dangerous. Voogdt's word was enough for me. If he'd said Van Noppen was Commander-in-Chief of the German forces, I should have believed it, I expect. The way he'd got at the secret of this wolframite business had shown me enough of his quality to insure my trusting his judgment forever after.

During all those months I had had the same evidences before my eyes as he, and not only had they told me nothing, but they had scarcely even stirred my curiosity. So far as my trade goes, I don't think there's anything wrong with my powers of observation. My sight is good, and I can feel coming weather better than most—though of course not as well as old salts with more experience. I know I was very proud when I got my extra master's ticket, for you don't get that for being a born fool; but by comparison with Voogdt I was like a blind man—blind and deaf.

And the courage of him! To go off single-handed at night, ashore in an unknown district with clever, sharp-eyed men looking out for him, quite ready to lay him out if they caught him—that was beyond me altogether. And here was I, who had left him to dangers of all sorts, and all unknown, dawdling across Channel in comfort as if I were out on a yachting-cruise on a mill-pond, with that simpering fool 'Kiah for company. I could have drowned myself for the sheer shame of it.

IT WAS a Wednesday night when we left Terneuzen, and we tied up at Erith at midnight of the following Friday. The post-office was closed, of course, but I got some stamps at the dock-office, posted Voogdt's letters before I turned in and next morning was at the office again before eight o'clock, waiting for it to open.

There was nothing from him as yet, and I went back aboard almost in a fever. Ward had gone away—to Birmingham, I suppose—and I was too worried to go out and see if Pamela Brand was at her lodgings. There was no sign of the last consignment of wolframite at our last berth, so I imagined Ward had managed to remove the cargo all right.

With only two of us aboard, it had been impossible to put any of the present cargo in bags; but I took the risk of declaring it as coprolite instead of ballast, and wrote Ward to say I'd done so. Very likely I was running the risk of inquiries, but I'd got past worrying about that.

By this time I didn't care if the whole business came out. The partners had all

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they wanted; they had said so. And as for me, I didn't care for anything beyond getting Voogdt back with a whole skin. Meanwhile the yarn about coprolite would save this one cargo from being taken away, and that was as much as I could do. I wasn't up to working out further ways and means of stealing wolframite just then.

My letter to Ward was curt—almost rude, I suppose—for I felt savage with the whole concern. But, reflecting that I couldn't do without his help, I put an urgent postscript at its foot, saying I was in trouble and that he must come and see me at once.

THE first of Voogdt's crew came aboard that afternoon. I became aware of him standing on the quay-side—a sturdily built, clean-shaven man in decent blue serge, with a round sailor's cap and ribbon and the initials of the Southern and Orient Mail in white across the breast of his guernsey.

I took him for a quartermaster of that line on a holiday, putting in his time hanging about the waterside, and not even when he hailed me did I guess who he was.

"You Cap'n West? Can I come aboard?"

Busy at the hand-winch, mechanically helping 'Kiah wind up tubs of mud from the hold, and with the back of my mind busy about Voogdt's affairs, I scarcely heard the chap but absent-mindedly grunted out some sort of permission. He jumped into our rigging like a monkey and slid to the deck beside me.

"Can you give me a job, Cap'n?" he asked.

"What sort of a job do you want?" I demanded with surprise.

A liner's quartermaster asking for a job on a coasting-ketch! It was as though a Harley Street specialist had applied for a billet as assistant to a country vet., or a K. C. begged to be allowed to conduct a five-shilling claim in a county-court. I looked the man up and down, thinking he was guying me.

"What sort of job do you want?" I asked again.

"'Fore the mast," he said. He spoke in a brisk jerky way, but his manner was respectful enough. "Or maybe mate, if you want a mate. Can I show you my discharges, Cap'n? In your cabin?"

Then I guessed what he was at and glanced round at 'Kiah out of the corner of my eye. Fortunately he wasn't paying any attention, having his work cut out hanging on the full weight of the winch. A tub was in mid-air, and for the moment I had taken my weight off the handle at my end.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Go aft and wait for me."

The tub once swung ashore, I beckoned a quay-lumper to take my place, and then went back to where the stranger stood by the companion, looking about him, and motioned him below.

When we reached the cabin it was he who asked the first question.

"You really are Captain West?" he said.

I showed him one or two envelopes addressed to me, and then, seeing he still hung in the wind as if doubtful, took down a book from my little shelf and opened it to show the name on the fly-leaf. It was one Austin had given me, and his name and mine together clinched the matter.

"'James Carthew-West from Austin Voogdt,'" he read. "Good enough. That's all right. You'll know the writing on my testimonial, skipper," and he handed me a sheet of letter-paper. It bore a short note with neither signature, date nor address—just half a dozen lines in Voogdt's writing on a half sheet of paper:

> Report yourself *at once* to James Carthew-West, skipper, ketch *Luck and Charity*, Erith. Ship with him in any capacity he thinks fit until you receive further instructions. Trust him *entirely*.

"All right?" he asked when I had done reading and handed back the paper.

"It seems all right. But what the deuce am I to do with you? Quartermasters from liners don't ship on packets like this without exciting remark."

"Hum," said he, and then laughed a little. "My nautical attire was pitched in the wrong key, eh? I'll tell you. The S. O. M. intermediate boats call at Antwerp. I'm going there to join one, and am working my passage with you to save my fare. How's that?"

The idea was good enough, and I nodded in approval.

"But you can't do coaster's work in clean serge."

"I've brought overalls. Am I to berth in the fo'castle? What sort of chap's that hand of yours?"

"A sound man—good as gold."

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"Hm. Has he got fleas, I wonder? . . . All right, no offense meant. It's no matter, anyway. Fleas won't kill me; I've had 'em before. Now I'll get my bag aboard and change, and then I'll come and bear a hand with the winch."

And, sure enough, in half an hour's time, his traps were in the fo'castle and their owner, in filthy dungarees, was sweating at the winch in my place, joking with 'Kiah as if he'd known him for months.

I began to think Voogdt hadn't been far out when he said there was some difference between his wasters and my remittance-men, for no remittance-man that ever I knew would have turned to like that. He'd have stuck up his nose in the air at the idea of associating with 'Kiah, and wanted me to go ashore and cement our acquaintance over a whisky-bottle.

WHEN we knocked off for dinner, I had a word or two with him while 'Kiah was dishing up.

"What's your name?" I asked.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know—anything you please. D'ye want my real name?"

"I don't care," I said, rather stiffly, for I didn't altogether like his casual manner. "I only want to know what I'm to call you."

"Oh. . . . Sellick 'll do, won't it? Dick Sellick."

No such name had been on any of the envelopes I had posted, and I said so, at once.

"Never mind. One name's as good as another. . . . I say, where's Austin?"

"I wish to Heaven I knew," I said, with sincerity.

"Don't you? Straight? No? When did you see him last?"

"Wednesday night."

"Where, then? I say, skipper, shut me up if I'm asking too many questions."

"I don't mind your questions, if he's a friend of yours."

"Friend, eh? Well, you know him, don't you? And he stood by me when I was down with enteric at Bloemfontein. Yes, I guess he's a friend, all right."

"Well, on Wednesday night 'Kiah—our man there—put him ashore at a crib called Hoogplaat on the south side of the Scheldt, and, if you want to know, I'm scared of my life as to what may have happened to him since."

"He's all right. I've seen Austin Voogdt in tight places before. . . . How much does your man know?"

"Nothing. He thinks Austin was trying to dodge the Dutch police, who wanted him for a drunken row. That's all."

"How did this letter come to be posted here?"

"I did that, at his instructions."

"Any other letters?"

"Any more questions?" I said.

He laughed.

"All right," said he. "Enough said. Only I was curious to know whether we should have any more company across."

"As to that, I don't know any more than you do," I said; and 'Kiah coming aft with my dinner brought the conversation to an end.

Sellick, as he had chosen to call himself, worked like a Trojan all the afternoon. At tea-time I noticed that his hands were galled and bleeding, and it filled me with amazement to see the way Austin could choose and use such a man.

Here was he, fresh from idleness and comfort in London, ready and willing to do monotonous and heavy labor for nothing, just because Voogdt had pitched him the tale that there was danger in it. He seemed to throw himself into his part as thoroughly as Voogdt himself could have done. I heard him say to 'Kiah, as he looked at his bleeding palms, that turning a hand-winch was " 'arder graft, matey, than spinnin' the wheel aboard the ol' *Pondicherry*."

'Kiah said he reckoned that was so. You could see he was very pleased at rubbing shoulders on equal terms with such a marine aristocrat as a liner's quartermaster. That was an exalted social position which he could understand and appreciate.

After tea I went to the post-office again, and was rejoiced to find a letter for me had arrived by the midday delivery. By the postmark it had come from Ghent, but it bore no address, only being headed by the date of the day after he had landed.

All well. Am going to Antwerp and shall be there until I hear from you. Before sailing report who has joined you to V. Austin, George Hotel, Antwerp. If you don't hear from me to the contrary leave Mainwaring and Colley at T. with C. They can desert, if you want an excuse for leaving them behind.

I sighed with relief. Surely he couldn't come to much harm in big towns like Ghent

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or Antwerp. They weren't like the lonely dark marshes I had been picturing in my mind all the time. One name he mentioned—Mainwaring—I had noticed on one of the letters I had posted overnight. The other was altogether strange.

For all I knew one of them might belong to this new hand, and was on my way back to the boat to ask when I met him coming up the street with 'Kiah, both of them apparently bent on spending the evening ashore.

'Kiah had cleaned himself as usual on leaving work, but Sellick still wore his dirty dungarees, and nobody could have distinguished him from any one of the dozens of other quay-lumpers and stevedores' men coming up the street from their day's work at the docks.

I nodded as I passed them and then turned and called him back. "Hi! you—Sellick."

He came back at once.

"Your name Mainwaring?"

He shook his head, looking a trifle sulky.

"Colley?"

"No. I say—those two bounders aren't coming. What?"

He seemed very disgusted.

"Voogdt advises me so."

"Hm. Rotters, both!"

"D'you know them?" I asked.

"Sh' think I did—the rotters! What Austin can see in that pair of fools lays over me."

"Don't you get squabbling aboard my ship," I said.

He grinned. "Hardly room, eh? . . . All right, though. No private quarrels. I understand. Anybody else coming?"

"I don't know."

"Pish!" he said. "Half the loafers in town, I expect. Nice sort of picnic-party."

"Yes—a picnic with bullets for sweets perhaps," I said grimly.

TO BE CONCLUDED

Aunt Charlotte's Visit

by C. Langton Clarke

MR. ALBERT SPENDER, entering the meagerly furnished apartment of Mr. Jeremiah Fidler, found his friend seated over the remains of a scanty breakfast, and ruefully regarding a letter propped against the sugar-bowl. To the anxious inquiries of his visitor, Mr. Fidler returned evasive replies, until, being pressed with some heat, and reminded of a long-standing friendship, he finally unbosomed himself.

"It's my aunt," he said, "my Aunt Charlotte."

"That's the rich one, isn't it?" queried Mr Spender with interest.

Mr. Fidler nodded.

"Well," insisted the other, "what's the matter with her? She ain't dead, is she?"

"Dead?" returned Mr. Fidler, with a bitter laugh. "No such luck. She's better, and she's coming here. Think of it! After being bedridden for years, to go and get well! She says she's been taking some new-fangled treatment."

"Perhaps she'll give you some money," suggested Mr. Spender, who was of an optimistic temperament. "Brace up and and take a cheerful view. She won't want to stay. Not in this house, I mean."

His gaze traveled round the bare room, and he repeated his remark with more conviction.

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"The fact of the matter is, Bert," Mr. Fidler said, after eying his friend for some minutes, as if gaging his ability to help him, "the fact of the matter is that I'm in a horrible mess. Seven years ago I wrote to inform Aunt Charlotte that I was married."

"Married?" Mr. Spender cried in astonishment.

Mr. Fidler waved his hand for silence.

"I wrote and told her," he continued, impressively, "that I was married to the daughter of a wealthy man, moving in excellent society, but that, owing to the deceitfulness of a false friend, my father-in-law was ruined, and that Mary and I were in a bad way financially. She sent five hundred dollars.

"A year after that it was my painful duty to inform her that Mary was dead, and that, owing to an undertaking-trust, the funeral-expenses were too heavy for my purse. She sent two hundred that time, and I sent her a picture of the cemetery, with a cross in ink, showing where my burial plot was."

"How long did you say it is since Mrs. Fidler died?" Mr. Spender inquired in chastened tones.

"She isn't dead!" answered the other.

"Where is she living, then?" Mr. Spender demanded impatiently.

"She isn't living anywhere."

"Look here, Jerry——" Mr. Spender was beginning angrily, when Mr. Fidler waved his hand again.

"There never was a Mrs. Fidler," he said. "She was a fiction. I wanted the money badly, or I wouldn't have done it. I knew Aunt Charlotte would never come to the city and, having finished Mary off, I thought it would be all right, but now little Flossie's gone and broken her leg. I wrote to tell Aunt Charlotte about it and, instead of sending me a check, she's going to pay me a visit."

"Who in thunder is little Flossie?" Mr. Spender demanded. "Another wife?"

Mr. Fidler shook his head over the other's impatience.

"Little Flossie is my only daughter," he said. "Mary's legacy. Six years old, and smart for her age. Do you want to hear some of the funny things she says?"

Mr. Spender stared at his friend, as if doubtful of his sanity.

"I suppose little Flossie's a myth too," he said at last.

Mr. Fidler sighed and nodded.

"The best thing you can do," Mr. Spender said brutally, "is to get little Flossie killed and buried before your aunt arrives. It won't cost you anything."

Mr. Fidler shook his head.

"She'd ask too many questions."

"Then leave word that you've taken little Flossie to the seaside for a few weeks."

"With a broken leg a week old?" Mr. Fidler returned reproachfully. "What sort of a father do you take me for?"

Mr. Spender threw up his hands in disgust and, after sitting for some minutes in profound thought, started hurriedly, and took his departure.

"Don't you do anything till you hear from me," he said, putting his head inside again. "I've got an idea."

Mr. Fidler, who was busy reading his letter over again, nodded absently.

TO MR. FIDLER'S great surprise, when he returned from a short afternoon stroll, he found his room in the possession of Mr. Spender and a small, keen-featured child, with beady black eyes.

"We were just waiting for you," Mr. Spender said genially. "Sit down."

Mr. Fidler, with arched brows, glanced interrogatively at his friend's companion.

"This," Mr. Spender said, with great *empressement*, "is little Flossie."

Mr. Fidler uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Little Flossie," insisted the other. "Otherwise Jane Mallory, youngest daughter of Mrs. Thomas Mallory, formerly known as Genevieve Leconte, who used to play soubrette parts. She's an actress too, ain't you, Jane?"

The child, with her sharp eyes fixed on Mr. Fidler's countenance, nodded her head vigorously.

"She's a slap-up actress too, for her age," Mr. Spender continued. "Played the dying child in 'East Lynne' last. If she can play a dying child so as to make all the women cry, I reckon she can play a broken leg for your Aunt Charlotte. I've arranged it with her mother. She'll play little Flossie for fifteen dollars, and whatever Aunt Charlotte gives her for herself. All you've got to do is to fix the landlady so she won't give it away."

Mr. Fidler raised a great number of

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objections, among them being the inconvenience of having a small child with a supposititious broken leg on his hands, but Mr. Spender was so enthusiastic and insistent that he finally gave way.

"What about a doctor?" he asked, after the arrangements had been thoroughly discussed, and little Flossie had been rehearsed in her part, even to the calling of Mr. Fidler "pa" at frequent intervals.

Mr. Spender admitted that he had overlooked that important character in the cast.

"We've got to have a doctor, sure," he said, "or Aunt Charlotte will be ringing in an outsider, and the jig would be up. Couldn't you let on you were a Christian Scientist?"

Mr. Fidler shook his head.

"It's simple enough," he said. "You will have to be the doctor."

"Me?" Mr. Spender cried, with a downward glance at his clothes. "A nice kind of a doctor I'd look! Why she wouldn't let me into the house in this outfit. I haven't got any clothes. Besides, I couldn't talk the lingo."

"Any kind of talk's good enough for that with a woman," urged Mr. Fidler, who seemed to have changed places with his friend. "Invent names when you get stuck, and as for the clothes——'

He went to the cupboard, and returned with a frock coat and a pair of trousers of very presentable appearance. Then he dived under the bed and extracted a hatbox, from which he took a tall silk hat.

"And what about you?" Mr. Spender inquired, eying the garments covetously.

"The seedier I look the better," the other answered. "I don't want to appear prosperous."

THUS the matter was arranged, and when Miss Charlotte Huckerberry, a stout, fresh-complexioned woman on the right side of fifty, was ushered into Mr. Fidler's room by a deferential landlady, an interesting tableau presented itself to her sympathetic gaze. A small girl, wearing an agonized expression, lay in the narrow bed. Mr. Fidler, his rich complexion toned down by a judicious application of powder, leaned anxiously over her, and Mr. Spender, imposing in his borrowed plumes, sat in a chair beside the bed, with a look of professional gravity which bordered on smugness.

"Sweet child," Miss Huckerberry said, embracing her supposed niece with much fervor, after cordially acknowledging a brief introduction to the doctor. "The very image of your dear mother—the eye—the mouth—the forehead——"

Mr. Spender, catching Mr. Fidler's eye, winked. Mr. Fidler, too much taken aback to appreciate the humor of the situation, gasped incoherently.

"Surely you notice it, Jerry," Miss Huckerberry insisted.

"Ye-e-es," Mr. Fidler replied, eying her suspiciously, "but I don't quite understand how you can. You never saw her mother."

"You forget the photograph you sent me, when you were married." Aunt Charlotte said reproachfully. "I treasure it still. Such a lovely face. A friend of mine declared it was the picture of some actress, I forget her name, and we nearly quarreled over it."

Mr. Fidler, who recollected having purchased the photograph in question at a stationer's, was at loss for a reply.

"Some people see queer likenesses," Mr. Spender said, coming to his friend's aid, and unconscious of the ambiguity of his remark. Miss Huckerberry bridled.

"The resemblance is most remarkable," she said. "I noticed it at once. Perhaps Mr. Spender never saw Mary. Let him see her picture, and I am sure he will agree with me."

"I—I—haven't got one," Mr. Fidler stammered.

"Not got one?" Miss Huckerberry echoed. "Not got a picture of your wife?"

Mr. Fidler, whose powers of invention were unequal to the strain, looked helplessly at his friend.

"It's true, madam," said the ingenious Mr. Spender, in a low voice. "He had one. Always carried it about with him. But somebody picked his pocket. He was like a madman. He can't bear to have it referred to."

In order to divert the stare of Miss Huckerberry's rather prominent eyes from his own and his friend's countenances he uncovered a limb, swathed in a complicated mass of bandages, and pretended to adjust one of them.

"Who put those on?" Miss Huckerberry demanded. "I never saw bandages like those before."

"Possibly not, madam," Mr. Spender replied, with professional hauteur. "Ladies

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as a rule haven't had much experience of broken legs."

"But I do know something about them," Miss Huckerberry insisted. "I attended ambulance-classes, and 'First Aid to the Injured' for six months, and I never saw anything like that. Why, they look as if they'd been just twisted round any way. And I know a good deal about anatomy too," she added. "I took a good deal of interest in it after I was cured. You couldn't tell me much about bones and fractures that I don't know already."

The two men exchanged startled glances, but Mr. Spender again rose to the occasion.

"In a case like this," he said with severity, "a common bandage, such as is taught to amateurs at an ambulance-class, would be worse than useless. This is a—a—Spenderian bandage, intended to give the bones and ligatures full freedom to unite. You will pardon me, but I am not accustomed—" his countenance assumed a look of great austerity—"I am not accustomed to have my work criticized."

So majestic was his demeanor that Miss Huckerberry capitulated at once, and was profuse in apologies, which Mr. Spender accepted with much condescension.

Miss Huckerberry, greatly impressed, was about to propound some more embarrassing questions, but Mr. Spender dexterously headed them off by going through the form of pulling out a watch, gazing with an expression of surprise at the empty palm of his hand and pleading a pressing engagement.

"CHARMING woman," said Mr. Spender, who was so taken with his part that he carried the professional manner as far as the hall-door, whither his friend accompanied him. "Comfortably off, I suppose?"

"A few thousand a year," Mr. Fidler replied, in an offhand fashion. "They'll be mine some say, I suppose, if she don't marry, and there's not much danger of that at her age. And look here, Bert, let yourself down a few rungs, and listen to me. We've got to be blamed careful. She knows too much. You'll be getting tripped up."

"My boy," Mr. Spender returned, tapping his forefinger on the other's waistcoat, "your Uncle Albert knows what he's about. I'm off to the library now to hunt up a book on broken legs, and what I don't know about 'em when I get through won't be worth knowing. You'll hear some of the most improving conversation in the next few days you ever listened to."

He strolled away, and Mr. Fidler, returning to the sick-room, was treated to a glowing eulogium on the manners and appearance of his versatile friend.

"So clever," said Miss Huckerberry.

Mr. Fidler said he was.

"And so good-looking!" the lady added with emphasis.

Mr. Fidler made a sound which was taken for assent.

"I hope to see a good deal of him while I am here," Miss Huckerberry continued. "He really seemed to quite like talking to me. I dote on clever men."

She rose to return to the small hotel where she had established herself, and, declining Mr. Fidler's offer of an escort, left that gentleman with considerable food for reflection.

"THERE'S no need for you to keep calling twice a day now, Bert, and staying two or three hours," Mr. Fidler said to his friend, as they stood before a neighboring bar, on the tenth day after Miss Huckerberry's arrival. "Let up on it."

"That's all right," Mr. Spender replied airily. "I'm enjoying myself first-class. I'm beginning to feel respectable, but I suppose you wouldn't appreciate that."

"What d'ye mean?" Mr. Fidler demanded, with some resentment.

"These clothes," replied the other, with a satisfied glance at his apparel, "and that high-level style of conversation suit me down to the ground. Besides—your aunt is a most estimable woman."

"You seem to be getting pretty thick," Mr. Fidler said sourly.

"She is an interesting study," his friend replied, "and I don't often get a chance to hobnob with the wealthy and influential."

"I'd like to see some of her money," growled Mr. Fidler, whose temper appeared to have been severely strained. "It's all very well for you, but I'm getting sick of it. No money, and a kid like that on my hands. And see here, Bert. You needn't write out any more of those fancy prescriptions. I'd sooner take my drinks here than out of an eight-ounce medicine-bottle. Aunt

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Charlotte took some of that fever-mixture yesterday—thought she had a chill coming on—and it went to her head. She's strict temperance, and didn't know what it was. I had to take the bottle away from her, or she'd have finished it."

Mr. Spender's ringing laugh grated so harshly on his friend's nerves that he turned away in disgust.

"You needn't come to-morrow," he said churlishly. "You needn't come any more. I'll look after that leg, and it'll get better a darned sight faster than you and Aunt Charlotte think for. And you'd better send back those clothes," he added offensively. "You can't feel respectable and comfortable at the same time."

Mr. Spender laughed again. "All right," he said. "Don't be surprised if I don't turn up after this. Love to Auntie."

Mr. Fidler vouchsafed no reply, and quitted the room in dudgeon.

MR. SPENDER'S absence next morning caused him little surprise; but as hour after hour passed, and Miss Huckerberry failed to put in an appearance, he began to feel uneasy. At noon a ring at the door-bell sent him feverishly down-stairs, only to be confronted by the postman, who handed him two letters, one addressed in the handwriting of Mr. Spender, and the other bearing the well-known chirography of Aunt Charlotte.

With a foreboding of disaster, Mr. Fidler carried them to the sick-room and, after a few moments' hesitation, opened that of Mr. Spender.

"Dear Nephew," it began. Mr. Fidler looked at the signature and groaned.

DEAR NEPHEW:

You will be surprised to hear that Aunt Charlotte and I were married last night. We leave for our home early this morning. I am going to give up the doctoring business, and tackle the market with Auntie's money. Don't be anxious about little Flossie. Aunt Charlotte isn't. I told her that I had arranged for Dr. Wagstaff — don't forget the name—to take the case over. You can make out his bill to me, and if it isn't too big, and you keep your mouth shut, I'll see that it's paid. I would have sent the clothes back, but I needed them for the wedding-trip. Sorry, old man, to have interfered with your testamentary expectations, but every man for himself in this world. Love to little Flossie.

Your affectionate uncle,
ALBERT SPENDER.

Mr. Fidler, with a hearty imprecation, cast the letter on the floor, and ground it beneath the heel of his slipper. Then he tore open the second missive, in the faint hope that it might contain a check. A hasty examination failed to reveal anything, however, except a sheet of tinted note-paper, on which the following lines were inscribed:

MY DEAR JERRY:

You will be surprised to hear that I am married. My Albert is a noble soul. How can I be thankful enough to have found such a husband to support me in my later years. Something tells me that some day he will be a leader in his profession. Love to dear little Flossie. I wish I could have sent you some money, but a few hundred dollars is all I have left now out of my fortune. I have been unlucky in speculations lately. I shall tell Albert when we reach home. I am sure of his sympathy. We leave in an hour.

In haste, your loving aunt,
CHARLOTTE SPENDER.

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The Well of Lafitte

by Nevil G. Henshaw

THIS is a story that the little hunchback, Jean Le Bossu, told me one night as we lay before our camp-fire far out upon the Louisiana coast. I had asked him of Lafitte and pirate gold, and in his reply he drifted quite easily into the tale:

AH, YES, M'sieu, I have often sought for treasure. Also I have been upon more than one expedition when it has been found. Yet never have I seen it borne safely away. Always there has been tragedy, swift and terrible. Perhaps there is a curse upon that sort of gold. Who knows?

At all events I am done with such ventures, for good. It was my last expedition that cured me. But I will tell you, and then you will understand.

It was at a time near the beginning of Winter and, in preparation for the hunting-season, I had put in at Anse Le Vert in search of supplies. All day I had bought and loaded, and I was smoking a last cigarette in the early dusk, with no thought save of an early rest and a start at daybreak, when a voice hailed me from the shore end of my little landing. It was a rough, domineering voice, and in it there was a harsh note as of command.

"Hola, you on board," it called. "You are Jean Le Bossu?"

"I am," I replied, and the speaker, with a grunt of satisfaction, came out to the edge of the landing.

In height and in weight he seemed little above the average, yet there was that about his compact, close-knit frame which gave one instantly the impression of power—not the power of the mind, but of the body. He was like the foreman of a railroad-gang that I once saw, a man of no greater size yet one who, with but a single word, could strike the fear of God into the hearts of his great, hulking laborers. For the rest, my visitor was low of brow, square of jaw and with small, evil eyes, the eyes of the driver of men.

"I am M'sieu Gar, owner of the Sailor's Rest at Morgan City," he began. "You have heard of my place, perhaps?"

I nodded for I had indeed heard of his place which, among the many infamous drinking-dens of the water-front, was the most infamous of all. As for its proprietor, he had the reputation of his brother the fish, the reputation that causes the fisherman to knock such a catch upon the head at once.

"So," went on M'sieu Gar. "I am here to have you take me upon an expedition. There will be myself, another and a small matter of equipment. At the most we should not be gone a week. What will be your charge?"

As this was not the time for argument, I named my price.

"It is enough," he growled. "Enough and to spare. But then you are a special man, as I have been told. You can keep your mouth shut?"

"I have been known to do so, M'sieu," I replied.

"And on these expeditions that you guide—you claim only your pay?" he continued.

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"What do you mean, M'sieu?" I inquired, although from the very first I had understood his mission.

At this he was silent for moment, and when he spoke it was in the slow, labored tone of one who, having an idea to convey, is unable to find the words wherewith to express it.

"It is this way," he began. "For a certain price you take a party of hunters out to the coast and back again. If lucky, these hunters kill a number of birds. You do not claim any part of these birds, do you?"

"I do not, M'sieu," I replied.

"Then," he continued, "if upon this expedition of mine I were to find birds or anything else, it would be the same, would it not?"

He paused anxiously while I, having enough of his clumsy efforts, decided to end the matter.

"You may rest easy, M'sieu," said I, "for we will make no expedition. You are too suspicious, and you are also lacking in frankness. When next you apply for a guide, say at once that you are upon a treasure-hunt, and that you intend keeping all the profits for yourself."

At this he sprang furiously forward, only to control himself the next moment, as though he recognized the futility of his rage.

"Come, Le Bossu," he pleaded, "surely you can understand the caution of one in such a business as mine. See, I will be frank with you. You have guessed my errand, and I will be satisfied with no one but yourself. As you have said, I am not willing to share with you, but I will add one half to your charge. Come. What do you say?"

"I say no, M'sieu," I replied. "I have my hunting to do, and I have also had more than enough of these blind chases into the marsh."

"And suppose that this is not a blind chase?" he began.

"That is what they all are at the beginning, M'sieu," I replied in a tone that I hoped would end the interview.

An instant M'sieu Gar hesitated, casting a glance over his shoulder into the dusk as though in search of some spying form. Then, with a sudden movement of decision he seized a post and leaned forward until his face was within a few inches of my own.

"And what if I should tell you that I had the true chart of the well of Lafitte?" he asked in a voice that had fallen to a whisper.

That well of Lafitte! Many years before, so the story ran, the *Julie*, a boat of Lafitte's, well-loaded with gold and other treasure, had been caught in the Bay Vermillion by a Government vessel. Unwilling to fight, and being possessed of great speed, the pirate had therefore entered the first bayou that opened into the marsh, hoping to lose her pursuer in the twisting maze of waterways beyond. But the Government vessel had hung on, trailing the *Julie* by her masts, which stood out in plain view, and thus the two raced onward until at sunset, and deep in the heart of the marsh, they were stopped by a calm.

Now during this calm, which lasted through the entire night, those upon the Government vessel were confident of success. True, the *Julie* might enter some branching bayou, but, on account of her weight, even with the most frenzied poling, it would be impossible for her to escape far enough to hide her telltale masts. Yet, when the search began at daybreak, in all that vast flat wilderness there was found not so much as the tip of a spar, the pursuers finally returning empty-handed to tell their story.

As for the mystery of it all, it was finally explained to the satisfaction of every one by old Martlette, a leader of those days.

"It is this way, my friends," said he. "It is evident that the *Julie* was sunk, her crew afterward escaping in the marsh. Also, as you all know, there is not a single bayou of depth enough for such a purpose. Now in time of war it is the custom of people to hide their valuables, in the ground, in the chimney—sometimes even in the well. That is what this fox of a Lafitte has done. Out there in the marsh he already knew of, or ran into, a well, a deep inland pool. When we find this well we will also find the *Julie*."

A wild tale? Perhaps so, yet from old Martlette to Jean Le Bossu there was not a man upon this coast who did not have his try at the well of Lafitte. I had sought it again and again. I would probably have sought it many times more. Therefore in my reply to M'sieu Gar there was little hesitation.

"Come aboard and we shall see, M'sieu," said I. "If the chart is what you say, I am your man."

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M'SIEU GAR came aboard and descended into my little cabin where, after first swearing me to secrecy, he drew forth from his pocket a folded paper. Seen in the steady light of my swinging lamp, his face was even less prepossessing than it had been outside, and the look with which he favored me was one of suspicion and hate.

"Wait until the prize is mine," it seemed to say. "Then I will be even with you."

But one glance at the chart drove all thought of his appearance from my mind. It was a crude, blotted piece of workmanship, scrawled upon a coarse paper by an untrained hand, yet there was something about it which inspired one with confidence. What this something was I could not say then, and I can not say now, but after the first brief look I knew that, if in the world there was a true chart of the well of Lafitte, that chart now lay before me.

"*Bien*," said I. "This looks promising enough to follow. You can count on me."

"For one-half over the price you named, all else to belong to me?" asked M'sieu Gar hastily.

"Exactly, M'sieu," I replied. "As for my reasons, they are my own. Perhaps if you had sought this phantom well as long and as unsuccessfully as I have, you would understand them. And where, if I may ask, did you get the chart?"

M'sieu Gar smiled, and into his eyes there crept a look of cruel cunning.

"I obtained it from a sailor," he answered.

That was all, yet in those cruel, cunning eyes I could see the whole story—the staggering sailor with his drunken boast of a coming fortune, the plying him with drink by the suddenly generous landlord, the final sodden entry into the unspeakable back room of the Sailor's Rest. Then the quick, cowardly blow, the deliberate search and afterward the silent, crumpled figure flung forth into the outside darkness.

"And now to business," continued M'sieu Gar. "You have provisions enough for the trip?"

"Ample, M'sieu," I replied.

"And you can sail at sunrise?"

"If the tide is right; perhaps before," I assured him.

M'sieu Gar replaced the chart in his pocket, and for a moment stood staring about my little cabin.

"One thing more," said he. "Those guns must be left behind."

"If you do not trust me, M'sieu," I began, but he brought his fist down upon the table with a crash.

"Trust!" he cried. "Do not be a fool, Le Bossu. In a matter of gold I would not trust a blessed angel. One hour before daybreak I will return with my equipment and my man."

"And this man?" I inquired, all opposition gone at the thought of what was before me. "He has seen the chart? He knows?"

M'sieu Gar stepped close, and searched me with a look that was like the drawing of a knife.

"He is an animal. He knows nothing," he replied. "I have engaged him, at his price, to dive for some goods lately lost in the bay. You understand? I need not tell you that I am relying upon your discretion, Le Bossu."

AS HE had promised, M'sieu Gar returned one hour before daybreak. With him he brought his diver, and a squat, heavy box which was carried by the two with great care. After this had been put aboard I slipped out into the current and made a try for the bar. As I had hoped, there was depth enough for a safe passage and, when the sun finally rose, it found us well out in the bay.

But with the coming of the day I experienced a change of feeling. What the night before had seemed a most interesting adventure, now appeared only an insane piece of curiosity. There was I, abandoning my hunting at the beginning of the season, and for what? My price I could triple by a week among the birds, and even if we were successful I would only see a deep, inland pool such as I had shot over a thousand times before. As for the treasure, if any, I would only have a look at it, the kind of look that means bitterness and the thought of what might have been.

Yes, I told myself, I had been a fool. Now it remained to me to make the best of my bargain if, with such passengers, there could be any best.

That this was improbable became quickly apparent, for no sooner were we well out in the bay, than M'sieu Gar laid aside whatever pretense of politeness he had assumed the night before, and became what

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he was—the harsh, brutal driver of men. Each order was an insult. Each movement contained a threat. It was as though, in seeking to cow me, he was also repaying me for my first refusal of his offer. Had I secreted a gun aboard, it might have been different. As it was, he was many times my size, and in addition there was an ominous bulge at his hip which he made no attempt to conceal.

My other passenger, the diver, was equally as hopeless as a companion. He was a huge, stupid creature, half-fish, half-animal, the kind that you can see any day upon the water-front at Morgan City. Despite his great size, his body was beautifully proportioned, but his face was like a mask of stone. In it there was no hint of expression, and the eyes were wholly without life or soul, like lamps that have been blown out.

On coming aboard he had said that his name was Emile, and after that he made no other remark. Once across the bar he sprawled himself in the bow, and there he lay all day long, staring up with unseeing eyes into the blue sky above. To the foul abuse of M'sieu Gar, to his occasional threats and kicks, he apparently paid no heed. He was like those workmen who can only be aroused when the tools of their craft are at hand.

Thus we went across the bay, the landlord bullying and cursing, the diver lying like a log in the bow, and of the two I hardly knew which was the harder to bear. But then there is little choice when one has to deal with a beast and a brute.

I made the Point Marrone at sunset and, hugging the marsh according to directions, came finally at dusk to that nameless bayou, which, if our information was correct, the *Julie* had entered upon her last voyage. Here I prepared to lay to for the night, well satisfied with my run, but M'sieu Gar was of a different opinion. Striding up to where I was about to cast my anchor, he jerked the rope from my hand.

"What is this?" he asked. "You are not thinking of stopping here?"

"For the night, yes, M'sieu," I replied. "Until daybreak we can do nothing inside."

The landlord gave a laugh that was a threat.

"Yet we will try it, Le Bossu," he sneered. "You may thank Heaven that you did not get your anchor down."

"But, M'sieu," I protested, "we might pass the spot in the dark. We might——"

With a sudden fierce gesture M'sieu Gar sprang forward and seized my arm, twisting it behind my back until it seemed that every bone was broken. A while he held me thus, relaxing his hold only when I was about to fall to the deck.

"Now will you go in?" he asked between his set teeth, as he prepared himself for another wrench.

But I, helpless though I was, could not forget my training.

"No," I gasped. "I will not risk the loss of my boat for you, or for any other man."

Bracing myself I endured the torture until it seemed that I must faint with agony, and then, just as stars and sky began to swim in a mist of pain, a second face was thrust close to my own. It was the heavy, stupid face of the diver and, as I searched it desparingly, I saw that it was as expressionless as before. In it there was no hint of protection, no look of compassion, and the eyes met mine with the dull stare of one long indifferent to human suffering. Then he spoke, his voice as flat and as emotionless as his face.

"Best not break it," said he. "Else who will work the boat?"

Releasing me quickly, M'sieu Gar faced about, his fist clenched.

"What?" he roared. "You are in league already, you two?"

The diver stared stupidly.

"In league?" he repeated. "What do you mean?"

With an oath the landlord drove his fist into the big man's face, springing back, and reaching quickly for his hip. Then something flashed in the starlight, and the diver and I found ourselves looking into the muzzle of a heavy automatic revolver.

"Now we will have an understanding," said M'sieu Gar in a low, even voice, from which all rage and bluster was gone. "You see this, you two? It will be ready for you from now on until we are back again. You, Le Bossu, may lower your anchor. You were right about the darkness, but you had your lesson to learn. As for you, Emile, you may as well hear now of what you will know to-morrow. We are after treasure, and I intend to keep it all. Therefore you may resign yourself to the price that we agreed upon. And one thing more, which

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it will pay you both to remember. When I sleep it is with one eye open."

And in this calm, deadly mood, which was far more terrible than any he had shown before, M'sieu Gar strode aft, his pistol covering us until he had disappeared in the cockpit.

"*Dieu!*" said I, and turned to the diver, who stood like some huge, bewildered animal, one hand before his bleeding face. But the big man made no reply, only removing the hand and staring at the great, stained fingers in a stupid, curious way. Then, as he gazed thus, there flashed into his lifeless eyes the most terrible look of hate that I ever saw. It was gone in an instant, but its message had been delivered in a manner far beyond that of any spoken word. "Wait," was what it had said; "just wait."

OF OUR journey up the nameless bayou next morning there is little to tell. I worked the boat, the diver sprawled as usual in the bow and M'sieu Gar, alert and watchful, called forth the directions from the chart. Slowly, carefully we picked up the course of the *Julie;* now, pushing forward with all the confidence of success, now pausing to debate the position of some long-vanished landmark. In the end, and at an hour near noon, we finally arrived at the spot which, if we had not strayed, should mark the entrance to the well.

Here we lay to, and here we searched the bank for a possible opening, but with no avail. Up and down, as far as the eye could reach, the thick, matted wall of grass stretched away, with never a gap or break to mar its level line.

It was then that I climbed the mast and, looking out over the marsh, saw that for which I had so often sought in vain. It was a pool, M'sieu, a large, round pool, and it lay distant a good quarter of a mile, separated from the bayou-bank by a thick, unbroken growth of grass. Thus, in the passing years, had the soft, shifting soil of the marsh completely clogged the former outlet. Thus, perhaps, had the searchers passed the spot again and again, little knowing that, for the trouble of a trip aloft, they would sight their goal.

Upon returning to the deck and reporting my discovery, our preparations were soon made. Elated, excited, M'sieu Gar drove the work even harder than before, while I, overcome by the interest of the moment, was only too willing to respond. As for the diver, he continued as wholly indifferent as before. Silent, wooden, he performed his tasks with a deliberation that called forth a torrent of abuse from his employer.

In the end we pushed off from the boat in my skiff, towing behind us my other craft, a light pirogue, which would hold but two, and in which had been placed some food and the dynamite and other equipment of M'sieu Gar. Having arrived at the bank, and secured the skiff, the pirogue was lifted to the shoulders of the diver and myself, and thus we set out across the marsh, M'sieu Gar splashing along behind, where his pistol would render his position impregnable.

The well, when we finally reached it, proved wholly worthy of its name. Dark, still and bordered by bare, sun-baked flats of mud, it indeed looked as though it might have been created by the hand of man. As for its depth, it was unlike that of any pool in my experience, the bottom dropping sheer away from the very edge of the flats. Truly was it a freak of the marsh, a prank, so it seemed, of the Evil One. At my first glance I knew that no good could ever come from such a place.

But there was work to do and we did it quickly, unloading the pirogue, and launching it from a flat. Then, stepping back, the diver shed his clothes, emerging from the rough garments like some dark and beautiful statue, each bone and muscle a marvel of proportion. Also, as he stared for a moment over the well, there came into his dead eyes a look of interest, of calculation. No longer was he the workman awaiting his tools. They now lay ready to his hand.

Entering the pirogue he sat in the bow, and, as I paddled out, employed himself in tying a rope to the tie-ring. Once at the spot that we had chosen for our beginning, he cast the rope overside, and walked to a point near the pirogue's middle. Here he stood for an instant, his delicately balanced weight scarce moving the frail craft.

"You can hold her here?" he asked.

"Easily," I replied.

"*Bien*," said he, and went over the side, striking the water with scarce a splash.

As for myself, I could only stare at the faintly troubled surface in amazement. It was wonderful, M'sieu, that heavy weight which, plunging from such a frail and un-

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steady foothold, left scarce a tremor behind.

A minute, two minutes, I waited, and then, like some returning monster, the diver rose into view. At sight of him M'sieu Gar set up a shout of inquiry from the flat, but the big man only shook his head as he regained his place in the bow.

"To the right," said he briefly, and, after I had paddled in that direction, he dropped overside again, coming up with no better luck than before.

Five times and from as many spots he went down into the dark water, only to return with a shake of his head. Then he rose from his sixth plunge, and there was that in his face which told me that he had not worked in vain.

"You have found it?" called M'sieu Gar as usual.

His hand upon the rope, his chin above the bow of the pirogue, the diver paused to look toward the flat. It was only a glance, a quick flash of the eyelids, but in that flash I caught the same look that I had surprised the night before. Then the big man climbed aboard with a slow, sullen nod of his head.

"Yes, I have found it," he called back. "But there will be much to do."

After this the spot was buoyed with the box that had held the equipment, and the real business of the expedition began. As for myself, I had little to do save to hold my pirogue in position, and for M'sieu Gar there was only the nerve-racking wait upon the flat. Everything now lay in the hands of the diver and, silent creature that he was, he gave us but little satisfaction. To my eager questions, to M'sieu Gar's frantic shouts, he answered with only an occasional "yes," or "no," diving down, coming up, regaining his breath and plunging in again with the regularity of a machine. What he did, what he saw at the foul bottom of the well, was known to himself alone.

It was near sunset and M'sieu Gar, his patience gone, was filling the air with obscene commands, when the diver rose to the surface with a new look upon his wooden face. It was a look of satisfaction, almost of joy, and as he climbed aboard his mouth twisted into what, in another, would have been a smile.

"*Bien*," said he. "It will not be long now. Let us go for the dynamite."

The dynamite aboard, we returned to our buoy where, taking the cartridges in one hand the diver prepared to descend. This time he struck the water with an added care, while I following his instructions, paid out the wires that were to explode the charge. Then there came the jerk that we had agreed upon as a signal, and a moment later the diver's head rose at the bow. As upon his former plunge his face wore the same look of satisfaction, but now I noticed that, although he panted for breath, his mouth was tightly closed.

"Now for the fun," he mumbled through his close-pressed lips, his eyes upon the waiting figure of M'sieu Gar.

ONCE at the flat the diver acted quickly, for the sun had all but dropped below the rim of the marsh. From the equipment he took a small box of polished wood, and to this he attached the wires that he had brought ashore. Next, having made certain that all was secure, he raised a strange, hoe-like projection in the box's top, and for an instant paused.

"Well?" called M'sieu Gar impatiently, "for what is the delay?"

As though he had been waiting for this question, the diver lowered his box, and reached up a hand toward his mouth. Then the hand came away, and went out before him, holding between thumb and forefinger a large yellow coin.

"For this," said he.

In his excitement M'sieu Gar sprang almost within reach of the outstretched hand.

"*Dieu!*" he cried. "And is there much of it? You can raise it all?"

The diver shrugged his broad shoulders, and when he replied it was with a sudden, unfamiliar ease, as though the sight of the gold had touched some hidden spring of energy.

"That depends upon you, M'sieu," he replied. "As for the coins, there are a quantity—all of them in boxes. If you would have me bring them up, you must first promise a fair division."

There was a space of silence in which the breath of M'sieu Gar came and went like the exhaust of a laboring engine. A dull, purplish flood of rage spread over his face, and his body shook as with a palsy.

"You hound, you thief!" he gasped finally. "And so you would try to hold me up at the last moment? What of our agreement?"

The diver laughed harshly.

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"Agreement?" he snarled. "And what agreement did you make with the sailor from whom you stole the chart? He was my cousin, that sailor. For two years we had been saving for this. We were almost ready when, in a drunken moment, he said too much. But you did not hit hard enough, M'sieu. You were quick, yet I heard in time, and put myself in your way. Now I am willing to be fair, since you have paid for the expedition. A third for myself, a third for my cousin, a third for you. Surely you can not expect more? Come, M'sieu. It is for you to say."

You have seen a cat watch a mouse, a snake charm a bird, M'sieu? That is what M'sieu Gar reminded me of as he faced the diver.

"And what if I refuse?" he asked in the low, deadly tone that was the worst of all.

The big man tapped his box.

"If we can not have our share, my cousin and I, then will the gold go to no one," he replied. "The wreck is but a rotten shell, lying upon a bed of bottomless mud. On my last trip I placed the dynamite in the heart of the boxes, which I had arranged for the purpose. One push of this handle, and all the divers in the world could not bring up so much as a dozen pieces. I am waiting, M'sieu. What do you say?"

Again there was a space of silence—a short space perhaps, yet one that seemed to me an eternity. Even now I can see it all—the dull afterglow, the shadowy marsh, the dingy well, the tense, waiting figures of the two. Also I can see the triumph that I read in each set face—the big man's clumsy confidence in his strategy, the landlord's crafty plan of a quick shot and another diver.

Then it came, all of it with the dreadful swiftness of lightning—the sudden, backward spring of M'sieu Gar, the sharp crack from the hip as the automatic cleared its holster. The bullet struck the other's bare chest with a smack like that of a hand, and with the sting the big man roused into a terrible activity. One movement drove the hoe-shaped handle downward, and then, with the hiss and roar of the spouting water, he cast the box aside and sprang toward his enemy.

Ah, M'sieu, but you should have seen the surprise, the horror, dawn upon the face of that driver of men; surprise that this huge, patient animal should turn against him, horror that the animal would not die. Slowly he backed away, as though held by the terror of the moment. Frantically he pumped his automatic, the shots following one another so quickly that they sounded as one. It was incredible that any human creature could endure such a hail of lead, yet the big man kept on, lurching drunkenly, as silent and as merciless as Fate.

With his last shot M'sieu Gar turned to fly, but already he had delayed too long. Quickly the great arms closed about him, gripping and crushing in an unbreakable hold. Then the big man broke his dreadful silence, his voice hoarse with pain.

"Come," he cried, as he staggered down the flat, "we are going after the gold—you and I."

One glimpse I had of them upon the edge, a glimpse that I shall never forget—the huge, naked diver, with his drooping jaw, his glazing eyes and his struggling burden mashed close to his riddled chest—the panting, choking landlord, fighting with teeth and nails, the look of surprise and horror now frozen upon his bloodless face. Then there came a scream, a splash and a long train of bubbles that burst in sullen little puffs upon the dark surface of the well.

And then, as though to mark the ending of the tragedy, the night came down with the suddenness of a falling curtain.

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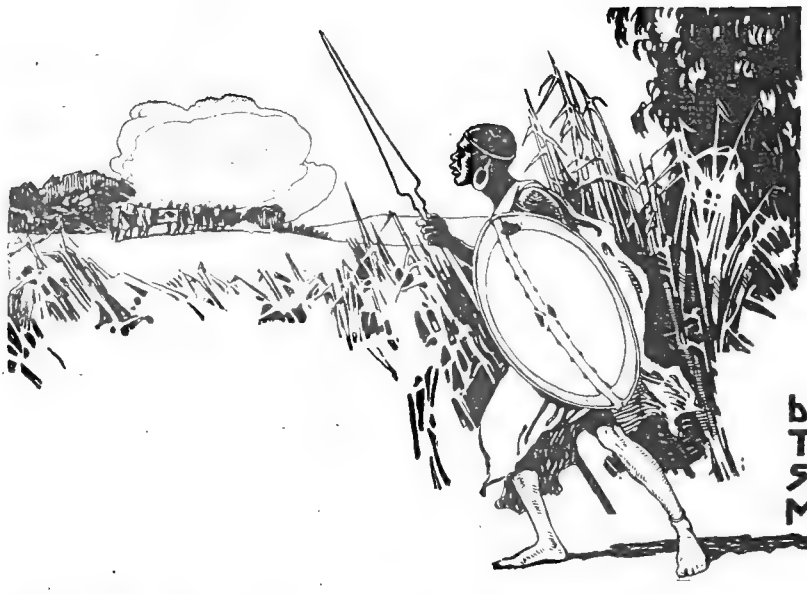

by Thomas Samson Miller

The Day of the Soldier

THE lieutenant swung on the tom-tom negro at his heels and raised his hand. The black ceased drumming, which was the signal for every pair of legs in the long column to halt like clockwork. The lieutenant shaded his eyes to stare up at the buzzards wheeling in the air over the high-grassed plain.

A young woman's face—a sunny, practical face with two violet-shot gray eyes—appeared above a hammock borne shoulder-high by big Kroo blacks.

"More trouble, Mr. Paget?" she queried.

"There's a party coming, Miss Wingate, for there are buzzards, and if my map is right, there is no village near here, and buzzards in Africa mean men. I'll throw out scouts."

He turned to a Houssa sergeant and gave the order.

"Perhaps they are Sir Harry Moore's men," Miss Wingate suggested.

"Not likely; I calculate that his Excellency is at least a day ahead—probably sitting down before Abukutu. We'll soon know."

"I do hope we are not in for more trouble," she said a little wearily.

"If there is, I'll give them a taste of the rifles. These natives have got to have their lesson."

His boyish face took on a hard expression.

"Spoken like a soldier, boy," she said, smiling into his eyes in a way that made him cast his own down.

Three weeks before, young Paget, acting under direct orders from Sir Harry Moore, had met Miss Wingate at the confluence of the Niger and Benue to escort her through the unsettled country between the Upper Benue and Lake Chad. He had set out with a strong distaste for his commission, for he understood that Edith Wingate was on a sentimental journey to the grave of her brother, Arthur Wingate of the ill-fated Buller-Wingate Expedition to the Yam Yam Country.

He had a youth's dislike of sentiment. But the young lady had agreeably surprised him. Perhaps time had healed her loss; perhaps she was not of the pining kind. He had liked her at once—liked her for her unconventional and companionable ways, her unshocked acceptance of African barbarities and her frankness.

That had been three weeks ago. Since then acquaintanceship had ripened quickly, in the close companionship of the camp-

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fires, the common dangers shared, not to mention her nursing of him through his baptismal dose of fever. He was only a youth, and she was the first white woman he had set eyes on in fifteen months of sun and negroes and barbarities

Only one thing lay between them, and that was Miss Wingate's stubborn suspicion of Sir Harry Moore; and that was not a small thing, for Moore was the lieutenant's soldier ideal. He carried his admiration for Moore obtrusively; was proud of it as of something manly and worthy. On the other hand, he would not admit even to himself more than a regard for Edith Wingate—was shy of it, as if it were a weakness. In his heart he knew that if it came to a show-down between Edith Wingate and Moore, he would follow the man body and soul. It would cause a wrench, but he would do it, and glory in it. He would have liked nothing better than to sing the praises of his superior officer to the girl. Her suspicion hurt him. There was mystery in her antagonism to Moore, and mystery in her foolhardy adventure, and he disliked mystery with all the dislike of an open nature.

"Boy," she said, "we ought to make Abukutu to-morrow?"

BEFORE he could answer, a scout came running in.

"Well?" demanded Paget.

"It am white man with carriers. No guns," the native answered.

"Did you make out the tribe of the carriers?"

"Yes, sah. They am Jekri."

Paget turned to the young lady. "Must be a trader—an ivory-hunter, perhaps. I'll go ahead and meet him. You will stay with the men."

He had his reason for this. He did not know what the coming man might report of conditions ahead, and he was sparing her as much as he could. He hurried down the trail, until he came on a small *safari* headed by a square-set man in white ducks.

They each nodded.

"Out of Abukutu?" asked Paget.

"Yes; less five men and carrying three wounded, as you can see," the other answered in the raucous voice of one who bawled orders the day long in harsh dialect to lazing blacks. "You're not trying to make Abukutu? But maybe you have soldiers back there. You'll want 'em," significantly. "His high muckawukums Sir Harry Moore is up there at his old trouble-raising game."

"The country is closed then?" said Paget, who did not care to discuss Moore with a trader.

"C-l-o-s-e-d! The Shehu has sent the war-drum to every village. It is closed fists for white man, though it has been open palms to me this many a season. But Moore has played his own game and picked a quarrel with the Shehu, and I lose a season's ivory trade."

Paget protested that he would rather not talk Sir Harry Moore, and turned back to his column; but the trader was carried away by indignation. He accommodated his steps to the lieutenant's, handling Moore with angry tongue.

"I never had any use for Moore, though I can't but admire—I can't but admire a man who, picked up by Buller from driving the blacks in a Niger Delta factory to do the rough work of the Buller-Wingate expedition, sees Buller taken off by fever, leaves Wingate in a hole he can't get out of, blazes a trail out of the country and transposes the title of the Buller-Wingate Expedition into the Gierson-Moore Expedition—the Lord alone knows where the Gierson came from—and boosts himself into the High Commissionership of the new country. I admire grit, but I do say—and every chop-room on the Niger echoes the same thing—that he ought to have handled Wingate's memory decently. I'm not Wingate's apologist. A man who'll put up his own good coin and dare the hardships of West African trails just to collect bugs is——"

"Shhh! Shut up!" Paget flung in a hoarse whisper as they took a bend in the trail and came on Edith Wingate's litter.

"Why, what's——" began the trader, and shut up like a jack-knife, staring open-mouthed into Edith Wingate's face, which appeared just then over the hammock. Recovering his surprise he brought out in an awed voice, "A white woman—a w-h-i-t-e woman, by all that's holy!"

He managed to doff his helmet.

Miss Wingate leaned forward, inquiring eagerly:

"You come from Abukutu?" The trader nodded. "Then you may have heard there of my brother—my brother who died there."

"Your brother?"

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Paget jumped in with introduction.

"This is Miss Wingate."

The trader's mouth gaped like a gaffed salmon's. Miss Wingate had to repeat her question.

"My brother was rescued from the Yam Yams by the Shehu, too late, however. He died in Abukutu of his wounds. At least that is what is reported. Perhaps you can add real information, and perhaps you can give us pointers on reaching Abukutu."

The trader looked from the girl to Paget and from Paget to the girl, as if he were dreaming. Then he shook himself awake.

"But, Miss Wingate, what you purpose is——"

Paget suddenly jumped into the discussion, with a warning glance to the trader. "You'd better look to your Jekri carriers, or they'll be mussing it with my Houssa. There's an outstanding tribal feud between them."

It was a quick-witted subterfuge, and served its purpose in drawing the trader away from Edith Wingate before he had committed himself on the situation at Abukutu. The trader was the first to speak when they were beyond ear-shot.

"WHAT a story! Now I'm next to Moore's game. He is deliberately closing Abukutu to this girl, lest——"

"You are quite wrong," Paget interposed. "Sir Harry Moore went ahead to pacify—to make our way easy."

The boy's loyalty was proof against calumny. But the trader snapped him up raucously.

"You're a young ass." Suddenly he fell into a deeply serious strain. "For heaven's sake, young un, take care what you are about. You're up against a deeper game than you savvy. Listen." He laid a detaining hand on Paget's arm as the boy started away, lest he hear more attacks on the honor of his idol. "Listen. I'm not talking for the love of it, but for yours and this girl's sake. You think Moore went ahead to pacify, but I tell you he went ahead to raise the country. It's as plain as day, for it is common talk that Wingate left papers with the Shehu, and there's been considerable speculation on the light those papers might throw on the Moore-Wingate scandal. You know what is said—that Moore left Wingate in a bad hole while he went supposedly to get help, but found a way out by the Shari route and left Wingate to his fate."

Paget defended his idol hotly.

"It's a lie. Wingate should have fought his way out when he found that Sir Harry could not get help to him. Wingate lost his head. He was no soldier, but one of those scientific Johnnies."

"E-x-a-c-t-l-y what Moore said in his famous work 'Across Yam Yam Country.' But the tongues wag it that Wingate stayed put on Moore's orders. Moore says 'no' to that, and dead men don't tell tales. For Heaven's sake, boy, take a tumble to yourself and look at this situation through clear glasses. Moore knows what this girl is after, and he knows that if she finds it bang goes his grip on a viscountcy, bang goes his High Commissionership, bang goes his reputation and the authority that's his meat and drink. Moore's a swashbuckler who has bluffed the Colonial Office into accepting him at his own value. But Wingate's papers may call the bluff, and that is not what Moore is going to see without a fight."

Paget answered hoarsely, his loyalty to his hero undaunted.

"You are all wrong. Sir Harry Moore gave me orders himself to do my very best to get Miss Wingate to Abukutu."

"Sure," the trader agreed. "He couldn't do anything else without giving gossip another sting. It was slick work to send a young officer to escort her and then slip ahead and raise the country. You tell me he is playing a straight game, eh? Then why did he march his men through the natives' standing mealies, and why, at Abukutu, did he return the Shehu's friendly message with the present of a pig?—a pig to a Mohammedan! Don't you think that Moore knew as well as you and I do that he was offering the grossest insult one can offer a Mohammedan? Psh! Think it over—think of this young woman before you go ahead, and walk into the trouble Moore is brewing for you. I've got to be going, but I've warned you. The rest is up to you. Ta ta."

Paget watched the trader's back disappearing down the trail as he thought over his warning. He could not believe the reading which the trader gave to the trouble at Abukutu. All his recollections of Moore, his dash, courage, soldiery qualities, rose up to contradict it.

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"This trader-Johnnie is mad at losing his ivory-trade and, as to the gossipers, they are all jealous of Sir Harry," he said. Anyway he would put up to Miss Wingate the question of whether they should turn back, though he knew what her answer would be. He fell back to her litter.

"MISS WINGATE," he said, "there's trouble at Abukutu. Sir Harry is at outs with the Shehu."

She answered quietly—too quietly, "I'm not surprised."

"What do you mean?" he asked, unnecessarily, for he knew the suspicion she nursed.

"Never mind," she said, wishing to spare his feelings. "We came prepared for trouble," she added, glancing at the Houssa soldiers.

"Yes; but this is likely to be serious, and I think we ought to turn back."

"You don't really think that," she said, with a smile. "You say it for me, for I know you'd like nothing better than what you call a 'brush' with the natives. As for me, since I have come this far, nothing short of a hostile army can stop me."

He flung up his head at that and without further parley gave the word to the tom-tom negro. Again the column lagged forward. He walked by her litter, singing his hero's praises with the unstinted love which David rendered Saul. But all she said was, "I hope you will be loyal to the lady you love." He colored furiously. Perhaps she had thought to tease from him a declaration. If so she reckoned without the force of his other passion. He answered her from his heart:

"Oh, you do a great man much wrong, and you wrong yourself in doing so. Wait until you meet Sir Harry. Wait till he looks into your eyes, as if he were seeing right into your heart. Then you will regret——"

She answered a little sadly, "Perhaps had he been nicer with my poor brother's memory I would feel different. But don't let's talk of Moore, or we may quarrel y'know."

"Wait till you see him," he cried, unable to answer her more directly without reflecting on her brother. "Wait till you see him!"

He believed she had only to see Moore to fall victim to the same qualities which had entranced himself. But when the sprawling adobe houses of Abukutu showed in a dip in the plain and the field-glasses revealed Moore in hostile camp before the Shehu's deploying forces, he could not down a suspicion as to whether the trouble might not have been avoided by palaver. He knew that was not Sir Harry's way — that the High Commissioner believed in striking home first and then palavering. But the boy did think that under the circumstances Sir Harry might have made an attempt to avoid the rupture in the interests of the girl who had dared so much for the secret Abukutu hid. He puzzled over this, until a great light came to him—gave him a new and wonderful interpretation to Moore's conduct.

He turned to the girl, who stood at his shoulder shading her eyes on the glittering spears that moved out of Abukutu, a curiously bitter expression on her face. Should he speak? Should he tell her what Sir Harry was doing for her? But she spoke first.

"I had so set my heart on rescuing my brother's papers and his honor; but I see that Sir Harry Moore has different ideas."

Her eyes filmed and she looked away.

The boy hesitated. Should he tell her Sir Harry's real object, as he saw it? Again she spoke first.

"If Moore's contention is right, if my brother really lacked initiative, authority, was really the victim of his own indecision, it seems strange to me that he does not seize this chance to speak with the witnesses of the tragedy and get evidence that would clear his own name, and silence all the talk."

That was more than the boy could suffer. He gave up his great discovery, though it should hurt her.

"Suppose Sir Harry closed Abukutu to spare you?"

His eyes were full of meaning.

"Spare me?"

"The truth; that your brother was—was what they say."

He could not bring himself to tongue the word "coward" which Moore's apologists freely used. But she had no hesitation whatever.

"You mean that my brother was a coward. You did not know Arthur. But we, his family, do, and it is because we know him that we feel a mystery in Moore's explanation as to how he came to leave

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Arthur to his fate. But we waste time talking. What do you make of the situation?"

FROM the advantage offered by the slight rise on which they stood the lieutenant studied the relative positions of the opposing forces, speaking his deductions to the girl as he glued his eyes to the glasses:

"Sir Harry is in camp, expecting attack, but making no move, evidently hoping to draw the Shehu's forces clear away from the town, so that when he does strike there'll be no retreat. He isn't strong enough to attack the town. He has no field-guns, and the place is walled."

"Then if he defeats them he bottles up Abukutu all the closer?" she commented bitterly. But the soldier was all intent on the fight.

"He moves," he suddenly cried. "He's flinging the Houssa forward into the high grass. . . . Ah! he's going to cut the Shehu's forces in two. He's going right in between, and meet annihilation or sweeping victory. That's him—no half-measures!" He turned a flushed face to her, his eyes dancing.

She bit her lip, seeing only defeat for her own mission, whatever the result.

"Are we to stay here inactive?" she said, then added with a flash of inspiration, "and you a soldier?"

It went right home, as she had hoped.

"If I might dare——"

She quickly and cleverly followed up her advantage. "It would not make a very nice story if Moore is cut up and you have to report that you stood by with soldiers and *watched*."

He breathed hard; muttered weakly, "I might butt in wrong; I don't know his intentions. If only there was time to get word with him and receive orders."

"Orders!"

She flung the word with emphasis that made him blush.

"If every soldier had waited orders, history would be altogether different. Courage is not a mere matter of sword. There's a moral courage far greater—a courage to do a thing on initiative. What did they say of poor Arthur? What will they say of you?"

His eyes were on the Shehu's men, his nostrils dilating, his head high, his hand clawing his sword-hilt. The temptress continued:

"There might even be a court martial. Your shoulder-straps might be taken from you."

"My God!" he breathed, and again, "My God!"

"Look," she cried, "look at those spears sneaking to the rear of Moore's camp! He is too low to see them. And what is that big black cloud behind them? It looks like pouring rain, yet it is not rain. One might think it was a great flight of birds."

Her curious insistence made him give the cloud more attention. Suddenly he shouted a discovery:

"It is a locust-swarm! The spearmen are sneaking to attack Sir Harry under cover of the locusts. If his Houssa are taken by surprise in the rear while he is at the front, they will break, and then—— I can't stand here and watch. You stay here with the carriers while I take my men on the run and give those sneaking spearmen a taste of their own medicine."

He started giving orders to his Houssa sergeant, when the girl quietly interjected a determined sentence.

"I am going with the soldiers."

"You? Impossible."

"Boy, boy," she said, smiling; "don't you know me yet? I went with Arthur up the Amazon and shared the trails of his entomological hunt in Sumatra. Please don't argue. It is useless."

WHAT could a boy do in the face of such determination? There were moments when she seemed his senior all ways; when he simply had to submit to her stubborn will. He said nothing—flung himself at the head of his men and marched straight for the locust-storm. She swung at his side, her strides easily pacing his.

The spearmen of the rear attack halted for the locusts, unsuspecting Paget's party, which entered the fringe of the cloud. Paget tore the gauze pugree from his helmet and gave it to Edith Wingate for a protecting veil. He shouted to her above the hissing-sissing of myriads of wings, "Keep close."

The next moment sight and sound were blotted out by the density of the insects.

In entering the cloud he had flung his men in one line, moving directly on the location of the spearmen. He was not calculating on actual fighting, which was almost impossible under the conditions, so much as on surprise.

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From ahead came the sound of volley-fire, muffled by the insistent whirr of the wings. Suddenly the volley-fire broke into intermittent shooting annotated by cries and shouts. Moore had been taken in the rear; the Houssa were breaking.

Paget yelled the "charge," and they went forward on the run. He passed the order down the line—man shouting it to man—to fire into the air, for owing to the closeness of Moore's men he dared not fire low.

A startling answer to the guns came out of the black, right before their faces; a throated roar of which the only decipherable words were "Allah, Allah, Allah."

Paget blundered into a shape. He felt for its head, fingering a turban, which was enough. His sword did bloody work. Other shapes followed, all possessed with one idea—to get away from the trap, away from the mysterious rear attack, away from devils conjured out of nowhere.

A bugle blew, less than twenty paces distant. Paget drew his revolver and fired three times quickly into the air. A revolver answered with three shots. Next moment the youth heard Moore shouting.

"Who are you? Halt your men until the locusts pass. The fight is over."

Next moment his bugler sounded the "assembly."

The locusts drifted on; the cloud thinned away to a fog, a mist; the sun shone. A tall khaki figure gradually shaped itself a few paces in front of Paget, who turned to look for Edith Wingate. She stood a little way behind, calmly removing her pugree veil. Then she came forward, her eyes focused on Sir Harry Moore—inquiry, suspicion, a nerved expectancy troubling their violet-shot depths.

Paget felt his heart thumping his ribs. He was so sure the moment had come when all suspicion would be dissolved and the girl would come to see his hero with his own enthusiasm. He looked from her to Sir Harry—into the hard-featured, aggressive face he knew so well—he looked, and suspended thought. Something in the V-brows of the High Commissioner caught his attention. Paget had seen that expression when a company of untried Houssa recruits had failed at a crucial moment. There was something wrong. Moore's bold, black, restless eyes were bent sharply on Miss Wingate, and he chewed the end of his military mustache with a nervousness the boy had never seen in his hero.

Miss Wingate returned the look without a flicker of her lashes, and neither spoke.

PAGET could stand it no longer. He stepped forward and made the introductions. Moore started, repeating absently:

"Miss Wingate. . . . Of course." Then he woke up and raised his helmet.

Edith Wingate slightly inclined her head. Paget went on speaking.

"I butted in, sir. I saw the blacks getting at your rear, under cover of the locusts and—and I hope I did the right thing, sir?"

Moore turned absent eyes on the boy, repeating, "the right thng—of course—why—oh, yes, Paget, you saved the day. It was good work."

He placed a hand on the boy's shoulder, smiling kindly into his eyes.

Paget thrilled under the touch and the praise and the smile. He straightened his back, and looked to Edith Wingate, as much as to say, "See; now you will admit he is big, is all I said of him."

But she did not respond to his enthusiasm. She spoke coldly, still looking directly at Moore.

"Your Excellency is well served in your officers. But I hope Lieutenant Paget's action has not disrupted your plans."

"My plans, Miss Wingate?" questioned Moore, looking at her with suspicion of hidden meanings, and went on, weighing his words as he spoke, "One does not plan in Africa. One waits developments and acts accordingly. Africa is synonymous with uncertainty."

"So my poor brother found," she quietly answered.

Moore seemed suddenly at loss for words. He stared at her almost rudely, his nervousness expressed in the way his hands twisted and wrung his military gauntlets.

"And do you now wait the next development?" she asked.

Paget answered for Moore. Flinging a finger toward Abukutu, he spoke:

"The Shehu is doing the developing; here comes an embassy."

Moore quickly turned toward the town. In an instant his trained eyes took in the situation.

"Seven umbrellas. The Shehu is himself coming."

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Edith Wingate turned to Paget for explanation, which he readily gave.

"A prince's rank is known by the number of umbrellas in his train."

"Then I shall see the Shehu—will be able to speak to him!" she eagerly cried. "Perhaps he has things that belonged to my brother."

Neither man answered her. Paget looked to Moore, wondering if the High Commissioner would save the girl exposure of her brother's cowardice, by refusing audience with the Shehu. But he could make nothing of Moore's moody features, excepting that something was wrong. He turned to a courier who came ahead of the main party. The man brought a Koran as a sign of friendship. Moore addressed him sharply in the dialect and the man made long answer, which Paget interpreted to Edith Wingate.

"He says it is harvest-time and the Shehu can not spare men for war. He—the Shehu —wants peace."

"Well?" she asked, listening to Moore's sharp reply, but not understanding a word of the dialect. Paget reluctantly interpreted.

"His Excellency will not palaver with the Shehu until the latter has humiliated himself for this attack," and he added apologetically, "One's got to teach them a lesson, y'know, Miss Wingate. One's got to uphold the flag."

"Oh," she cried, tears of bitter disappointment starting to her eyes, and turned to Moore, making a direct appeal.

"If your Excellency could see a way to divorce my humble affairs from the State's —if I might deal directly with the Shehu without offending diplomacy. . . . I have come so far—dared so much," she pleaded, her voice breaking.

Moore did not answer for several moments, moments filled with brooding thought, and then he spoke wide of the mark, as much to himself as to his audience.

"Every dog has its day."

"Beg your pardon, sir?" said Paget.

The High Commissioner again laid a heavy hand on the boy's shoulder, pinching him affectionately, speaking in saddened strain.

"We must help Miss Wingate; we must not disappoint her expectations of—well, Miss Wingate alone knows just what she does expect. But I can not appear in this matter, so I'll deputy you, Paget, to act for me and receive the Shehu. Come to my tent and report at sundown. I have despatches to write—probably my last," he enigmatically added, and strode away to his tent.

Paget turned to Edith Wingate, his lower lip trembling.

"Sir Harry is sick. I never saw him like this," he said.

"I feel very sorry for him; very sorry for his sickness. It is the worst sickness on earth—a sick conscience."

"Oh, no, no, no!" he cried.

"I'm sorry for you, boy," she said. "You have been so loyal, and Sir Harry means so much to you. But here is the Shehu, the barbarian who befriended my brother and who probably holds the key to the Moore-Wingate calumny. Will you be my interpreter?"

"Yes, though I'd rather not, for you will find that Sir Harry wrote the truth—that your brother threw his life away on indecision."

A DISCORD of huge hand-rattles and tom-toming stopped further conversation. The Shehu came into camp with a ruffianly retinue. He was a benevolent-looking old man, a little stout, a pair of live-coal black eyes alone there to reveal the warrior and ruler. The same eyes now fastened on Edith Wingate, the first white woman they had ever seen. But he was far too dignified to allow his curiosity to appear. He saluted.

Paget introduced the girl as the sister of the white man whom he had befriended. The live-coal eyes lighted up with interest. He made a speech, which Paget repeated in English to Edith Wingate.

"He says that he loved your brother; that he, your brother, was wise in the ways of the stars, but not in the ways of men, or he would not have palavered with the Yam Yam cannibals, from whom the Shehu rescued him. The Shehu also says that your brother left writings with him, a big book, he says, which he has brought with him for the Great Massa, meaning the High Commissioner. He says now he will give the book to you. But please control yourself, Miss Wingate. Don't let the Shehu see emotion. Africans don't understand it, y'know."

She looked at him with mouth awry, struggling to repress her excitement and

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nervousness. But when a courtier approached with a big package of bound papers she flung forward her two hands, clutching the package from the man, snatching them to her heaving breast, breathing hard. In pity for her distress Paget cut short the interview, which was easily done, for it was sundown and the Shehu was eager for prayers.

Paget would have left her with her prize, but she insisted that he come with her and read.

"Come," she said, "let's find a tent; you must read with me."

He made no pretense of his eagerness, but hurried to find a tent, which he commandeered of a Houssa sergeant, also a saucer of nut-oil and cotton wick. They went down on their stomachs on the sergeant's reed mat, chins on palms, propped on elbows, hair touching.

She turned the leaves quickly, following the misfortunes of the Buller-Wingate Expedition from the headings, until she came on the last camp in the Yam Yam Country, where they both slowly perused the writing, which was not always very clear, and grew into a rough scrawl as fever got its tighter grip on the writer. Suddenly she raised her eyes, crying out:

"Here it is! Here is the beginning of the end. Oh, read it aloud for me; I can't see the writing—I can't see." She brushed her hand across her wet lashes. Paget read:

—the Yam Yams have closed the Benue route and have us on all sides. Moore has picked the best men and gone to try and force a way to Kukawa, to get help. I have only sick men and a few carriers with me; so I can hardly move from camp as the enemy know our weakness and are very bold.

The next entry was dated two days later:

I have all my work cut out guarding against desertions, as much in the interests of the deserters as for the good of us all, as I am certain they don't get through the enemy's lines, but into his cooking-pots. The Yam Yams are confirmed cannibals.

Sleeping-sickness has broken out in camp. I have acquired valuable data on this scourge of Africa, but unless help comes soon it will be lost to science.

Followed data on the sickness, which Paget skipped, hurrying on to the tragedy. The next entry of importance was five days later:

I can not understand why I do not hear from Moore. We have eaten our goats and there is no more fresh milk, but if we had not eaten them they would have starved to death. If Moore had not been so positive in his orders that I should sit down here on the ammunition-cases until he got help to me I would certainly strike camp and try and force the enemy's lines. Anything rather than this terrible emaciation. My heart bleeds for the poor blacks, whom we have drawn so far from their native villages.

Buried four men to-day—three from fever and one from a Yam Yam poisoned arrow. Medicines are out.

The Shehu of Abukutu is reported friendly, so I ask for volunteers to try and get a message to him. Have picked two men and sent them. If the Shehu can get us food we can hold on until Moore returns.

Paget looked up, to see the girl's eyes swimming. He slipped a hand to her. Her fingers closed on it. He spoke huskily:

"There was some misunderstanding. Your brother mistook Sir Harry's orders."

But she had impatiently turned the leaf, and there was the fatal order itself, in Moore's well-known flowing scrawl, pinned to the text, just as if Wingate had foreseen Moore's excuse to the world, for the next entry revealed that Moore's desertion was already half-whispered.

All last night the Yam Yams taunted us; they said that the "Fighting White," which is their name for Moore, has gone home to white man's country via the Shari. It is too hideous to believe; yet why does he not get word to me?

Then followed a page about the Yam Yams, written in the face of death and with the patience of a scholar, ending with a terribly graphic picture.

The Yam Yams have built their fires within view of the camp and swung up great earthen pots, in which they promise to cook us. They say if they eat white man they will acquire his magic. They are not without humor and we indulge in many tilts of wits as we await the outcome.

Edith Wingate raised her head. She was crying silently; but the Wingate pride was there.

"And you doubted his courage!" she said.

The boy closed the book and slowly rose. He could bear to read no more. His world toppled about him; he shivered; he felt as if something warm and bright had gone out of his life.

"Don't take it to heart so!" said the girl, rising with him.

He neither saw nor heard, his vision filled with Moore's order to Wingate.

She touched his hand, speaking softly.

"You loved Moore so!"

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He woke at that. He pushed her from him, speaking vehemently:

"I banked everything on Sir Harry. I cared nothing for his origin. It was nothing to me that he was just a negro-driver—a palm-oil-ruffian, as they used to sneer. I only saw——"

He stopped, spreading his hands, ashamed for the break in his voice.

"I am sorry—dreadfully sorry that my find should be your loss," she said.

"Ah, yes," he warmly replied. "Yes, I must congratulate you. But not now—presently. I must go to Sir Harry, on orders," he added with a lame smile.

SHE dragged his steps to Moore's tent, and hung several moments by the sentry at the flap, unable to bring himself to the painful meeting with his fallen hero. But Moore within had heard the sentry bring his rifle to the salute. Perhaps he guessed, for he appeared in the tent-flap. He laid a hand on the boy's shoulder. Paget's heart beat to suffocation. He parted lips to speak, but no words came. Moore looked up at the skyful of winking stars; an unusual action, but everything about him was unusual just now.

"It's a real camp-fire night, eh, Paget?"

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant articulated in choked whisper.

"Come within; I have final orders to give you—the last I shall probably issue as High Commissioner."

He bobbed his height under the flap. Paget followed. Sir Harry sat at a folding table, before a pile of despatches. He testily indicated a seat to the boy.

"Sit down, Paget—sit down."

He fingered his papers nervously a while, then began a halting *apologia* that must have been bitter medicine to his pride.

"Wingate ought to have got out. How can one foresee and plan in Africa? I tried to get runners through to him telling him the country was closed behind me and that I could not make the camp again. But he stayed put like a bushman."

He paused, his black, restless eyes boring the boy, waiting comment.

Paget spoke in a strange voice:

"But afterward, sir? Your published book—its effect upon Wingate's memory?"

"Psh! What did I say?—that Wingate was vacillating; that he did not know how to handle Africans—too much coddling. That was misinterpreted. I threw no accusation whatever of cowardice. But that's beside the mark. According to the game I ought to have fought my way back to him, even at the sacrifice of my negroes and self. We are bossed by sentiment, Paget."

"Yes, sir. We've got to play the game," the boy stoutly affirmed his creed.

"Play the game!" echoed his Excellency. "What is the game but to get there, to accomplish results? Haven't I added a new protectorate to the Empire? Haven't I boosted my old mother from a little village post-office and shop into the lady class? Haven't I held the field against all the monocled high-borns, in spite of the gossip and sneers? But it is all over now, though it was great while it lasted. We've pulled through some fine work, you and I, boy."

"Yes, sir," Paget flung up his head at the remembrance.

"And now I'm snuffed out like the Little Corporal, because a man stayed put on orders—on orders in Africa! Napoleon came back from Elba, but no soldier has ever come back from dishonor. . . . Well, Paget, it is good-by. Escort Miss Wingate back to the Niger, deliver the despatch I will send you presently to Major Maltby, who will be your next High Commissioner—Maltby the palaverer, the diplomat, cautious Maltby! The day of the soldier is gone. Well, it's good-by. You will shake hands, boy?"

Paget took the iron grip of the big man, but could not look him in the eyes. He was ashamed of the moisture on his own lashes. He backed out of the tent looking at his toes, and went straight to the girl, to his only surviving romance.

She was wrapping the precious diary in canvas. She put it aside instantly at the sight of his pain and rose up beside him.

"I'm to escort you back," he said.

"That's nice for me. And you?"

"Oh, Miss Wingate—Edith, you must know."

"Yes," she answered, "I know—dear."

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The Sea-Wife's Challenge

by Henry Oyen

ON THE face of it it seemed a foolish thing to do. I should have booked on one of the big fruit-boats and enjoyed all the comforts of home. But the booking-agent for the little *Toroagua* of the Independent outfit needed my passage-money to hold his job, and being a man of family he haunted me with the fear of discharge writ large in his clerk-man's eyes.

He was a small man, stooped and apologetic, and might have appeared to advantage on a high stool, a thick ledger on the desk before him and a pen stuck authoritatively behind his ear. He whined me into taking a look at the *Toroagua*—"so they'll know I'm trying anyhow"—and there I met Captain Mackey, and the agent's job was safe.

That hairy old sea-horse gave me warm and liquid welcome, and for the next ten days I enjoyed the *Toroagua's* ingenious discomforts for the sake of the nights spent out on the fore-deck, when the soft darkness, in which only the red glow of cigars showed where each sat, and the lazy slap, slap of water on the bow conspired with me to turn Capain Mackey's thoughts to reminiscence.

"Like a mystery that's never been solved—the sea," he was musing aloud one night. "There are things about it—funny things—too funny for me to figure out. Some love it, some hate it and most of us who live on it do both without knowing why. And some fear it. It hits different people different ways. But it's always wilful, and playful, and strong—like the kind of woman who plays with men's souls. I've seen things that I can't understand. Don't want to try, either. It isn't good to try to understand too much.

"It does strange things to some people. I was just thinking about that fellow—some years ago—Eric Gunderson."

"That's a good name for a sea-yarn," I volunteered as he paused. "What happened to him?"

I heard the Captain's deck-chair creak as his big frame heaved with a silent chuckle, and he began his story:

THE name—being Norwegian, it does make you think of a sailor, doesn't it? Well, that's one funny part of this thing. Gunderson wasn't a sailor. I never saw anybody farther away from being that than he was. And he wasn't a Norwegian, either, unless it was so far back that he didn't know about it himself. I asked him first time I laid eyes on him. That was in the old Red D Line office on the Brooklyn side,

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some years ago, when I was First on the old *Florania*, Captain Cracken.

He'd just come on as bookkeeper for the house, and when I heard his name I says, "You must be Norwegian, ain't you?"

"Nope," says he, "I'm an American, born and raised in Des Moines, Iowa."

He was proud of it, which was all right. I says casually how I'd known a lot of men of that name who took to the sea, and quick as a flash he came back, "Yes, but I took a course in a Chicago business-college."

He was proud of that, too. Some people are built awful funny.

"Nothing to do with the sea," says he, "just because I'm working in a steamship office. This is just like any other business-office to me," he says.

Do you make him out? A cocky, little pen-pushing clerk, that was what he was, and combed his hair straight back and wore rubbers and carried an umbrella when it looked like rain.

Being on the short run then and having business that took me into the office every trip, I began to see more or less of him, and one way or another we got to know each other pretty well, considering the difference in our styles. He had a big room in a house over in Bay Ridge where I used to stop times between trips, and he took the books home to work on them nights, and sometimes I'd be laying on his sofa, smoking and listening to him tell what rotten business-men they were who were running the Line.

Did you ever hear a young clerk who couldn't do better than his old man if he had the chance? Well, Gunderson in those days was the worst of the breed. Cranky and nervous and sneering—maybe it's being cooped up in those brigs they call offices that makes them that way. But there must have been something about him, even then, or I wouldn't have wasted time on his course.

Perhaps it was the difference. He didn't know that the world was made of anything besides streets and buildings and street-cars and such things, and when he talked you'd never know there was such a thing as the sea and a sailor's life. I guess that was it; I needed the change. Dollars and cents, and desks and typewriters, and darn a man who'd leave an ink-spot on his books—oh it was awful! But somehow I kept looking him up. His name and his not being Norwegian interested me, too. I kept plugging at him about that, but he showed fair and square that his people had gone West from some place in Connecticut where they'd been long enough to be Daughters of the Revolution, or whatever that fleet is called.

I used to spoof him sometimes about his name. Once I got old Cap'n Olson, of the *Scandihoovian*—well, a little mellow, anyhow, and had him sing Norwegian sea-songs for the young man's benefit. He didn't like 'em, Gunderson didn't. No music to 'em, he says. Give him "Sweet Adeline" for a song, says he.

Sometimes his girl would come in—oh, certainly, there was a girl, though you wouldn't hardly look for a woman to have a hook in Gunderson's life, weedy and cranky and ambitious as he was. I guess there wouldn't have been, either, 'cause he wasn't the kind of man who goes out and gets him a woman. But the cashier in the office was a girl.

She was the one; Miss Agatha Mims, an old maid at twenty-eight, thin and sharp all over to look at, and—and like a New England school-teacher who's gone into business. You know how I feel about women; my cap in my hand to all of 'em, God bless 'em! But every time I looked at Miss Mims I felt like smiling at her, not with her, and that isn't the way a woman ought to make a man feel. She hated me and despised me, fore and aft, not particularly because it was me, but because I was typical of those horrid, coarse seamen.

That was Miss Mims. She shuddered every time one of the Line's sailors rolled into the office. You know what a cat thinks of water? That's it. I remember once Old Olson came visiting in his dripping oil-skins with his old red beard sticking out like a bearskin, and Miss Mims about fainted away. She used to glare at us through the wire-work around her cage like we were wild animals who ought to be loaded up some place where refined, self-controlled people needn't go—a ship on the sea, for instance.

Do you make Miss Mims? Thin through the chest and a gold chain on her glasses. Well, there you have the two of them, a pair laid down on the same patterns, which ain't the way folks usually mate.

Working together eight hours a day and Miss Mims being twenty-eight hurried things some. Pretty soon they were engaged to be married, and she used to try to look me to death when she'd come in and find me in Gunderson's office. I guess she

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thought I might corrupt him with my coarseness and lack of control and lead him to sea and ruin. She had her man safely docked and lined, too, for she made him throw me over cold. Oh, you never saw anything colder than he was after she'd got in her work. He let me feel that he couldn't associate with people like me. His place was among nice people who wore high collars and knew about important things like stocks and business-deals and so on—people who could help him in his career. Me? I was an outcast. I had to laugh.

They had picked out the course they were going to sail, safe and true. There wasn't anything that you might call sudden or hot-blooded about them. She was going to keep on working right up to the day they were married, and mebbe beyond; and they weren't going to get married until they had a nice little purse stowed away, and a home rigged up and the rigging paid for.

He was the cautious one of the pair, though she wasn't exactly impulsive or reckless. He wasn't going to make the mistake so many young lads make, of getting married without thinking. It might interfere with his career. I ain't sure they didn't have a little house picked out over in Flatbush, one of those quick-built craft you pay for in monthly trips, and they were going to be owners of that before they married. But that I can't say for sure.

IN SPITE of his letting me understand that he couldn't keep on my course any longer, Gunderson and I always passed a word or two at the end of each trip, with Miss Mims watching us through her wires like a cat with a young one to guard, and pretty soon, in the Spring it was, when you could smell the sou'easters walking up the bay even there in the office, pretty soon I noticed there was something about him, in his eyes or something, that made me wonder if something was wrong with him and the girl maybe. Then one trip I saw him standing looking out of the office-window at the old *Florania* as we were clearing. Kind of hungry-like he looked, and he followed her with his eyes down the bay as far as he could see. After I'd seen him like this three or four trips I squared 'round to him and asked was anything wrong between him and her.

"No," he says, like he didn't know how to answer, "no, there ain't anything what you could call wrong between us, only," says he, dropping his voice, "only—I been having a rather remarkable experience lately, and I got it into my head I want to make a trip with you on the *Florania*. Miss Mims don't think I should," says he. "Nothing to speak of," he says.

Well, when I got my wind back I says, "What's come over you, boy? *You* wanting to go on the water!"

He grinned like he had the first touch of seasickness, blinking his weak eyes, and says, "It is kind of funny, ain't it? First time in my life. I don't know why!"

A blind man could see there was something back of this, and I says, "Out with it. How'd come by the idea?"

I was surprised by the way the cockiness went out of him at that, like a man who's had to own up to himself he's off his course and is willing some one should set him right.

When he was sure I wouldn't laugh at him he says, "It's a remarkable experience. It came to me the night we were setting the day for our wedding," says he. "We were sitting way down there on the Ridge near the water, looking down the Narrows toward the Hook, and just as we'd agreed that next Thanksgiving was the day for us, I—oh, it's absolutely foolish, of course," he says, "but as sure as you're standing before me, Mackey, I heard, or imagined I heard, somebody—or some*thing* shouting at me from out there—'way out, beyond the Hook some place. Crazy, isn't it?" he says. "But, by George, Mackey," says he, "it was so real that I jumped to my feet."

It sounded so queer to hear him sitting there on his high stool with a pen in his hand and talking that way that I just stood and stared, and he tried to laugh it off.

"Anything else?" I says.

"Yes," he says, and he looked pretty troubled. "I went back there alone the next night and there wasn't anything to it. But the night after that we were out there together," says he, "and then it was the same as the first night, only more so. Something calling at me," says he, "'way out there some place—'way, 'way out beyond the Hook."

You may be able to get bearings from that. I never could work anything out of it. I says, "Any drinks?"

"Shucks," says he, "you know I never took more'n two beers in my life. No, sir,"

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says he, "I went out there alone half a dozen times and nothing doing. But every time I was with her the thing came back. I had to quit going out there," he says. "It was balling up my books."

He didn't like it. I could see that it was bothering him more than he wanted to own, because it was something that wasn't charted on his career.

"And is that how you came to want a trip on the *Florania?*" I says.

That was it, he said. "One day I was standing here watching you go out, and all of a sudden it hit me that I ought to be on board."

"*Ought* to?" says I.

"It's funny," he says, shaking his head, "but that's the way it hit me. It wasn't that I just wanted to be on board. Understand?" says he.

I didn't, and I wanted to laugh at him, of course, because it all sounded foolish to me there in that office, but there was something that made me feel almost sorry for him, the cockiness being out of him and all.

"Well, why don't you come aboard some trip, then?" I says. "You can get off for three weeks, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, I could fix that up all right," he says, and with that all his cockiness came back. "But Miss Mims doesn't like the idea."

" 'Fraid you'll get drowned, I suppose," says I.

"She is afraid of the water," he said, all serious, "and to tell the truth so am I. But she says I haven't got any business feeling that way, and she's quite right, too. Just the same," says he, "I certainly would like to take one trip."

Well, it went on that way all through the Summer. I spoofed him a little about it at first, handing him descriptive literature got out by the tourist-department, and telling him about what nice first cabins were vacant and little things like that, but after I'd seen him a few times at the window watching the *Florania* leave port I left off. The poor devil was getting thin over it, but he had a hold on himself now and hoisted his cocky, superior little ensign every time I hove in sight.

"Never mind whether I'm going to take that trip or not," says he one time. "I'm too busy to waste time in useless talk, *if* you please."

Another time he says, "Oh, please don't try to mix in a businessman's affairs, Mackey" He was cockier than ever, 'cause now he was slapping it on, to hide that he was troubled. And Miss Mims, oh, man dear, I wish you could have seen how she glowered at me if she saw me talking to him. A bum and an outcast who was presuming on refined people's politeness, that's what her looks would have made me feel like if I hadn't been one of those coarse sailormen who have no shame. She kept him tight in dock, right enough, though sailing-days he was always there at the window, and I couldn't help thinking that some day he'd slip his lines and make the trip to St. John's with us, in spite of her.

But the Summer went without it happening, and when October came, and they were to be married Thanksgiving Day, I says to myself, "You'll have to hurry up, my boy, because once she puts the church-splice on you there'll be no sea-trip for you."

II

WELL, we came back with the last load of Autumn tourist-trade about November first that year, and while we're laying up waiting for sailing-day, and thanking Heaven we're going to be plain, lowly freighters till next Spring, Gunderson comes strutting out on the pier cocky as an owner and sings up at me, "Well, we're going with you this trip."

"Who's 'we' ?" says I.

"Miss Mims and myself," he says. "And see you give us a pleasant ride or there'll be something said by the Superintendent."

Then he told me about how she'd consented to his making the trip if she went with him. She wouldn't let him go alone, and that was funny, because she was scared to death of the water. The trip would bring them back to Brooklyn the day before Thanksgiving and then wedding-bells and no more sea for them. I asked him if he'd been out there on the Ridge with her lately, and he says yes.

"Did you still dream you heard something?" I asked.

"Louder than ever," he says; but it wasn't troubling him now any, and there was a kind of a gleam in his eyes because he was coming aboard.

We sailed on a Saturday that time, I remember, and Miss Mims had one of the royal suites and Gunderson the other. She

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came aboard with her jaw set like a woman who's made her mind to go through a thing, no matter how unpleasant it may be, on account of some fool man. But he—man dear, he was as excited as a kid with his first drinks working in him. Couldn't sit still a minute. Before we were out of the bay he had been all over the *Florania*, racing up and down the decks, up to the bridge, back to the aft—all over—and talking his cocky talk like a machine all the time.

There was something kind of wild in his eyes, too, but I knew he never touched the stuff and wouldn't have dared, anyhow, her being aboard. She just sat still in a deck-chair and watched him like a hawk; and sometimes I could see that she was puzzled.

The *Florania*, being on the tourist-run Summers, we'd had our experiences with nosy passengers, but, well, you'll get some idea of what Gunderson was on that trip when I tell you that by the second day out every man-Jack on board was dodging him for a pest. When a passenger can do that to a whole ship's company, 'ware that man as a sailing-companion.

To hear him talk you'd have thought he was running the whole Red D Line, not to mention the old *Florania*. One minute he'd be up on the bridge giving the old man his opinions on cargo-business, and Cap'n Cracken was no Sunday-school boy either, and next he'd be down giving Finlay information he'd got out of some magazine about fuel-units and turbine-theories—Finlay who could have had one of the big liners if he had been ambitious enough to stay sober. And for ignorance of boats and water he beat the old women who kick because the rollers make the boat rock.

Miss Mims she just sat there and watched him. She let him go as he pleased, not holding him to her side at all. I couldn't help thinking that inside her she was saying, "Have your little spree, my dear. When I have you docked in that little house in Flatbush, you'll steer straight enough on the course that runs from home to office and back again."

It was in her tight lips.

We had fair weather, clear and smooth, going up, until two days from St. John's, when a little chill came down from the north and the skies darkened. It was the early November weather rolling down to the banks, and when we hit the first bit of rough water a change came over Gunderson.

It wasn't *rough* water, you understand, but not quite the looking-glass it had been, and it made a difference in him. He stopped running around so much and dropped his cocky talk. A little nor'wester woke us up for about an hour, and Gunderson hunched up in a deck-chair 'longside of Miss Mims, and sat there pretty still and small and sort of kept lookout steadily toward the north. At first I took it to be seasickness coming on, but it wasn't. It was queer to see him.

BY THE time we made St. John's it had cleared up, and it was brght and smooth again, but something had happened to Gunderson and his chipperness didn't come back. He didn't run around any more, and he left us alone and didn't say a word, and we used to walk past to look at him sitting there, not sick, and not making love either, but just sitting with his chin on his chest and looking 'way off to the north.

At St. John's they went ashore the minute we tied up, and stayed away the three days we laid there. We took on six passengers, four women and two men, and for a time it looked as if we'd have to go ashore and hunt up Gunderson, but exactly at sailing-time they came aboard. And Gunderson changed their deck-chairs so he could sit looking over the stern to the north, as small and quiet as before. We almost forgot he was aboard.

We sailed late in the afternoon and there was just a fringe of black clouds in the north, and the weather had turned a little chill. There was no wind to speak of though, and no signs of what was coming. About dark—I was in my cabin reading—Gunderson came in and says: "Are we going to have a storm, Mackey?"

"A storm?" I says. "No, certainly not. What makes you ask?"

"I think we are," he says. "Come on out on the deck," says he, and I went out.

"There," he says, holding his face up and sniffing the air, "don't you feel something coming toward us?"

I didn't. There was the same little breeze as when we sailed and it nipped you a little because it had come down over the ice, but that was all. It was clear up above, too.

"I feel it," says he. "It's funny you can't."

"What do you feel?" I says.

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"I don't know," says he. "Something coming toward us. I thought maybe it was going to be a storm."

I looked at him, and for the first time since the weather had roughened he wasn't looking scared. More like a man who was half asleep, that's what he was.

"No," I says, "there isn't any storm coming, and we've got fresh salmon for dinner. Come on."

After dinner it began to rain a little, nothing to speak of, but enough to make a man put on his oilskins. The wind was nor'-by-nor'east, and it was pretty dark. We were short-handed, and the old man was in one of his ugly moods and giving everybody the rough side of his tongue, so I wasn't feeling particularly sociable when Gunderson comes slipping up to me along the port rail.

"Better get to bed," I says. "You'll get wet."

He didn't seem to hear. "Guess it's coming all right, ain't it?" he says.

"What's coming?" says I.

"That—thing, whatever it is," he says, all excited, but not scared.

"We're going to have a little rain," says I.

"No," he says, shaking his head, "no, it ain't rain."

I moved away and left him standing there hanging to the rail. Pretty soon a cabin door opened and Miss Mims sings out, "Eric! You mustn't stand outside. You'll catch a cold."

Then he went in. That was the last I saw of him until the old *Florania* struck—in the morning.

Yes, he was right about something coming toward us. Man dear, but that was a storm! It hit us almost before we knew it, a hurricane, with snow so thick you couldn't see the fore-deck from the bridge and rough water—terribly rough water. The little *Florania* ducked bows and shivered like a cold dog when the first blow hit her stern, then it was roll and pitch and thank God it hadn't hit us broadside on.

After a while the wheel-house was smashed and the steering-gear shot to pieces and after that the *Florania* was just a little box of iron that God Almighty's waters played with as they pleased. A little before daylight we struck so hard that rivets in the forward plates flew like bullets, and there we stuck as hard and fast as if we'd been riveted on, with the rollers going over us, and daylight showed that we were spitted on one of the rock ledges west of St. Shotts.

THE snow let up soon after it grew light and we made out the St. Shotts cliffs rising perhaps a mile from our bows. Straight up and down, like the sides of a liner, those cliffs were, as far as we could see, and we were figuring the *Florania* never would hold together, you understand, and were thinking of boats for all, so we felt a little sick at the sight of such a shore.

After a while one of the men who'd been raised on the water about there said if he wasn't mistaken there ought to be something of a beach in the cliffs about a mile south from where we lay.

Cap'n Cracken had the best eyes, in spite of his years, and the strongest glasses, and pretty soon he picked up the spot the man was thinking of—a little bend in the rocks with a sort of a ledge running out from the base of the cliffs.

"That's all right then in case we want to go ashore," says the old man, and then all hands turned to see how the *Florania* lay. After we got through we felt a lot better, for, seeing that the *Florania* was booked to strike, she couldn't have picked out a better place to do it or a better way to do it in than the way she had struck. She'd jammed her bows into a narrow break in the rocks that held her like a vise, and to make her more solid there was a tongue of rock jammed up through her mid-bottom plates so tight that the pumps took care of all the water that came in without trouble.

We lay stern-on to the weather and the long, slow rollers that came on smooth as oil, and hit with the weight of the North Atlantic behind them, didn't start us an inch. They'd done their work too well when they pounded the *Florania* into that vise.

"Plates all sound aft, sir, and making no water," reports Finlay, and the crew gave a cheer. They were mostly family-men, and the boats had all gone by in the night except the number one. And it was about then that I saw Gunderson again.

What had happened to that boy during the night I never could begin to figure out. You understand that it was weather that kept the passengers in the cabins with a steward at the door to see that they didn't get out, and there was wailing and gnashing

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of teeth, men and women, and in the morning those passengers were helpless with funk. Except our clerk-man. He was very much man—a different man. Talked low and steady and looked you between the eyes, and was quiet and serious, but not afraid.

"Well, Mackey, it came didn't it?" he says. "I knew it would. I felt something coming. Are we in a pretty bad way?" he asks.

Man dear, it did you good to hear him speak! You've known such men, quiet and even-talkers, and the minute you heard them speak you knew they were good boys to have near you in any trouble. That was Gunderson that morning, while the North Atlantic was sluicing the little *Florania* from stern to bows. I forgot all his smallness in the past and spoke him as a man who deserved respect. Everybody did who passed words with him that morning, even old Cracken. It was in his voice and his eyes and something else.

The way we were lying then it looked like a case of wait and eat and grow fat until somebody came along and took us off, and we were a fairly comfortable outfit until about three in the afternoon, when Gunderson went mad. Cap'n Cracken and Finlay and myself were standing together when he comes up on deck, walking slow and dazed, like a man who's half asleep, or cold drunk.

His mouth was open and his tongue was hanging out, and his forehead was working up and down like something was puzzling him—something that he could almost understand, but not quite, and that was hurting him bad. He wasn't pretty. Straight toward us he came, and then he straightened up and brushed his hands over his eyes and looked around wild, and then—then he gave a scream that gives me shivers along the spine when I think of it to this day.

For the voice wasn't Gunderson's. There was another man inside of him using him to say something. Never before or since have I heard such a sound come from a human throat, and don't want to. He jumped over and laid his hand on Cap'n Cracken's arm.

"We must go," he says. "We must go at once. She's going down."

I tell you, man, the way he said it was scary.

"Nonsense," says the old man when he got his tongue. Just "Nonsense," was all he said, and he wasn't strong on it either.

Gunderson's voice went up until it split the noise of the rollers like thunder. "I tell you she's going down!" he says. "We must leave at once," says he.

I says to humor him, "How do you know she's going down, old man?" Then that twitching came back into his forehead and his eyes were struggling as if something was hurting him again.

"I don't know, Mackey," he says. "I know it though. It's like that other thing I felt coming. I know it," he says. "We've got to go."

The three of us looked at each other—knowing he was crazy—and the old man gave me the eye to take him below. I led him away, talking easy, and all I could get out of him was what he'd said before. When we got to the saloon he says, "It's on account of the woman, you know, Mackey. I've got to get her off."

"All right, old man," I says, "we'll get her off."

He was quiet about five minutes. Then he gave that awful roar again and jumped up. I tried to hold him and he stuck out his arm and, man, it wasn't flesh and bone at all, it was steel, hard steel! I went up against a table. Gunderson, he ran out with me after him and caught Cap'n Cracken on the bridge. "That boat," he says. "Hurry up with the boat. Do you hear me? We've got to go—quick!"

I don't know what there was about it, but before I knew what I was saying I'd sung out, "He's right, sir!"

I knew it in my bones, though I was sorry a second after I'd spoke. But no tongue-lashing.

The old man looked us over and then looked across to that beach in the cliffs. The Red D Line had never lost a passenger, and the Line was Cap'n Cracken's religion. "He's not right," says he, "but, Mackey, you may take the number one boat and a crew and land all passengers with provisions and canvas shelters on yon strip of beach."

Then I knew that the old man, too, had been carried away same as myself.

THE weather had eased a little, but the rollers looked bad to the passengers, and we had to fair heave them into the boat, except Gunderson and Miss Mims. He dropped down, quick and

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easy, like he'd lived in small boats most of his life, and she followed because he said it was all right. I'd got a green man in the crew and Gunderson watched him mishandle his oar while the other five men fought to keep her head on, and then he suddenly let go of Miss Mims—he'd been holding his arm around her—and growled. He caught the man around the throat and hauled him off the seat and took the oar himself. We went on all right then, and none of us saw anything queer in the way he bent to that sweep, though I don't believe he'd ever had one in his hands before.

I beached fair and easy on a big roller that carried us well up toward the cliffs, and before the next one came along we'd run the boat up high and dry. We were in a sort of half-moon bend in the rocks. The cliffs ran straight up and down behind us, black, slippery stone that couldn't be climbed, and the water was rough in front. But we were high and safe, and the place was fairly well sheltered.

We felt pretty good about it, and I wished that the old man had said for me to come back and take off the rest of the crew and him. But he was stubborn, Cap'n Cracken, and Finlay swore that the plates would hold.

Gunderson was first out of the boat, and he began walking up and down the beach, kicking in the sand with his heels and humming a tune—clean crazy. Sometimes he'd take off his hat and run his hands through his hair and wave his arms at the sky and sing out, "Hai-yah!" or something like that, then he'd come back and pat the girl on the shoulder and laugh. She sat still and looked at him a little scared, like she didn't know him. And he'd handled that oar like a sailor born.

Then he began to grow more restless. He walked up and down the beach with quicker steps and was twisting his head and looking round and round, out to sea, up at the cliffs, down at the sand and at us. I saw that puzzled look come into his eyes and his forehead was twitching again, and he stopped humming.

It was something like he was trying hard to remember something and couldn't quite. Then all of a sudden, about an hour after we'd landed it was, he gave a yell and we looked at him, and there he was standing with his mouth open and his eyes sticking out, pointing at the water on the beach.

"What's wrong, old man?" I says easy.

"The tide!" he yells. "Look, look!"

"Oh, that's all right, Gunderson," I says, and at his name his head went up stiff and he eyed me square. "We're way above high-tide mark."

Perhaps a minute he looked at me like that. Then he threw back his head and laughed—at me. "The tide," says he, "it fills this place. I remember. It came on us once before. We had to go." . . . And I know he'd never been north of Boston in his life!

Well, the next minute one of the crew—the man who hailed from those waters—jumped up and sang out, "He's right, sir. I mind this place now. I've heard of the tide here, sir. It's Dundee's Race. The tide swings in and fills the gap. He's right sir. We can't bide."

I looked down where Gunderson had pointed, and there was water over rocks that had been above the gunn'ls when we came in. "Far up it comes," he says, pointing up at the cliffs. "And—swift," says he. "We must go," and he starts for the boat.

I'D HEARD of Dundee's Race, and it had the reputation that Gunderson and the man gave it. So back in the boat we went and fought the wind and tide to get to sea. There it was that the steering-sweep wrenched out of my hand and the butt of it hit me like a derrick-boom and broke my arm and stretched me helpless in the bottom, and the near-oar man jumped up and threw himself on it just in time to keep us from going broadside.

I saw Gunderson jump over me and take the man's oar, and from where I lay I could see his thin back bending and straightening like steel under his coat while they fought to beat the big roller that was for throwing us back on the beach. It was terrible work, straight in the teeth of the wind, and with the tide now running like a mill-race, but at every stroke Gunderson would sing out between his teeth "Hai!" and "Hai!" the men would say, and they'd lift her out of the water. Inches was all we made, but we made them steadily and began to draw near the *Florania*.

All of a sudden Gunderson jumped up and threw himself at the steering-oar. The man who held it stuck out his foot and Gunderson flew back on top of me.

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"No farther!" he says, jumping up. "No farther. We can't board her. She's going down. Turn around," says he.

He was talking in that queer voice again, not his own but some other man's, a bigger, huskier man than him.

"Turn ——!" says the man. "Pull your oar."

Then Gunderson stood up straight. "You can't go any nearer," he says.

"Sit down, you loon," says the man.

"You can't go any nearer," says Gunderson and took a step forward.

"Can't I?" says the man.

"It's murder," says Gunderson, wild. "She's going down. You can't go any nearer."

The man growled and pulled a knife, all the time holding the boat's nose straight for the *Florania's* ladder. "I can't?" says he.

We were pretty near now. A few more strokes and we'd lay alongside.

"I can't?" says the man, handling his knife. "Who's going to stop me?"

Then—then—you'll think I was dreaming, but there are other men who can bear me out—Gunderson laughed. There was an ax lashed on by his seat.

"Who'll stop me?" says the man, and Gunderson picked up the ax in one hand and whirled it around his head like a little cane, and yells something—I don't know what it was; it had no sense anyhow—just wild yells. There was a lot of it, but all I remember of it sounded like: "Hai-yah! Yai! Goon-dahr! Huvding!"

One time a Squarehead sailor told me it was probably Norwegian words—"*Jeg, Gundar, Hovding*"— that Gunderson yelled. He said it would mean "I! Gundar! Chief!" . . . I dunno . . . Gunderson didn't know any Norwegian. None at all. How could it have been Norwegian?

Well, anyway, what happened next wasn't pretty. The man at the rudder-oar reached forward with the knife and Gunderson laughed and, well, he sliced sideways with the ax. Then he turned around, swinging the ax over our heads. "Hai-yah!" he bellows and the rest of that queer talk. Then he threw himself on the steering-oar, veered around under the lea of the *Florania* and pointed the boat back toward the shore. And the men kept rowing as he wanted to, with their eyes on him, and I raised my head over the thwarts and saw the stern of the *Florania* lift and shake under a big roller and the bows raised, and then she slipped off the rocks and went down stern first, and Captain Cracken and Finlay and a dozen old shipmates gone in a minute.

The wind and oars were carrying us on shore at a good rate, but Gunderson was holding her almost quartering, and pretty soon I saw that we were passing the bend in the cliffs, the only place where we could land.

"Look where you're going, old man!" I sung out.

"Yes," he says laughing. And I looked, and the bend where we'd been was nothing but water, deep, swirling water.

Miss Mims she was crying and he bent toward her laughing, and says, "It's all right, girl. We'll soon find a place where you'll be safe."

I spoke up and asked him what he intended to do. Mind you, man, I was in command, but I asked him that.

"Run along the shore till we sight an opening in the cliffs, and run in," says he.

I turned to the man who knew that shore and asked if he knew of any such openings.

"None," says he.

"Row on," says Gunderson. "There always are in cliffs that look like that."

"How do you know?" I says.

"I don't know how I know," he says slowly, "but I know it. Row on," says he.

I'VE seen some good boatman here and there in my time, but never before or since have I seen a man take a small ship's boat along shore in weather like that. Man, it was genius. He played with her, played with her against the wind and tide and beat them and laughed. And he was humming a tune all the time, as if he wasn't happy except when he was out in a little boat with only oars for power and a few planks between us and a drink with Davy Jones. He picked his way over and between those long rollers like there was a channel with buoys marked through them. Inshore we'd go just far enough, then tack, and out we'd go quartering with some big comber hissing past because we'd cheated it. The men kept on rowing without a word, and the passengers were half dead with what they'd seen, so we could hear him humming up there at the oar with the wind whistling around him, and his eyes watching for a break in the cliffs.

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"There's always an opening in cliffs that look like that," says he, and then he saw it, and gave a yell.

It was just a little black crack in the rock and the water was fair boiling against the side where it sloshed in. Out to sea he drove her and squared around straight for the hole.

"Man, you'll never make it!" says I; "and there's no place to land."

"We'll go in on a big wave," he says, slow and looking straight ahead. "It will carry us up over the rocks," says he, "and then we'll find a quiet spot inside."

"How do you know there is any place inside?" I says, for, as far as we could see, it was just a crack running a little way into the cliffs.

"I don't know," he says, quieting down some, "but there ought to be. There always is, when they look like that," says he.

We shot for that little opening like a petrel going home. The tide and wind was behind us, and the men were pulling hard, for Gunderson was yelling "Hai!" and they were answering at every stroke. The man must have been made of steel all through then or the steering-oar would have torn his arms out, the way he held her straight on in that water. It looked crazy. We went into a perfect maelstrom right in front of the opening. A big one heaved us over it, and for a second we hung almost still with rocks under both bows.

Then another big one came, a roarer, and Gunderson sang out, "Hai," and the men heaved, and over we went, through a swirl of foam and water where we couldn't see. Then it was like running down hill, and then the water was quiet, and when I got my senses back I saw that we were beached on some white sand in a natural lagoon in the lea of the St. Shotts cliffs.

"Hai!" says Gunderson, "I knew it," and he picked up Miss Mims and jumped out with her in his arms with the rest of us following, some cheering, some crying and some swearing. Inland there was a wooded country and I could see paths on the hills.

"We're all right now," I sang out, and then I looked at Gunderson. He was staring at the rough water out beyond the opening and holding up his arm as if to guard it off and backing away. And he was little and sunk together again and nervous. Miss Mims stood still, and he began to move toward her. Then he glanced from the water to the boat, and the man he'd hit was lying across a seat.

He turned to the girl, like for help; "What have I done!" says he; and fainted dead away. And Miss Mims she looked at the water and at him, and smiled a little, and then she picked up his head and held it against her breast and kissed him; and I haven't felt like laughing at any woman since—not *any*—since then."

CAPTAIN MACKEY'S voice died away gradually and ceased with a finality that told that the tale was done. It was many minutes before I had the temerity to break the silence.

"What became of Gunderson afterward?" I asked.

Captain Mackey started so his deck-chair creaked.

"Huh!" he said. "I thought you knew him—Gunderson, that booking-agent back at Porto Bocca, that sold you your ticket. Certainly—that's the man."

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The Little Yellow Men

by John Kenneth Turner

A Crisis of the Pacific Coast

SYNOPSIS—"Are the Japs, with their pooled interests, going to drive white labor out of California?" That's the big question which husky young **Ward Elder** finds stirring the packing-houses and vineyards of Fresno. He hears it from **Crowe**, the labor-leader; from cool, slim, beautiful **Isola Kent**, the crack girl raisin-packer whose father used to be a minister; and from **"Handsome Jack,"** the opium-fiend.

Ward meets some of the Japs—a pretty high-caste girl called **Toku**; her father, **Hamagawa**; and her suitor, **Osaiki**, the well-dressed dandy. Both men seem to have mysterious power among the Japs. Osaiki's jealousy over Toku is increased when Ward Elder beats him at an exhibition-match, by American boxing *vs.* ju-jitsu.

The Japs kill several white raisin-pickers, whose bodies are exposed at the Fresno morgue, rousing the whites to frenzy. A white mob tries to run the Japs out, but the Japs are armed and unafraid. Excitement is growing hourly. Militia are patrolling the town.

CHAPTER XIII

A HAZARDOUS JOURNEY

FRESNO'S Little Asia was an armed camp cut off from the rest of the world. No white man was knowingly permitted to pass those square-jawed, alien sentries. No one knew what was going on in that densely populated area beyond the railroad tracks.

While it was generally supposed that the activities of the Japanese were all bent toward defense, there were a few who considered other possibilities. Among these were Dudley Crowe and Ward Elder. At one time Ward had intended to exhibit the yellow paper dropped by Hamagawa to Crowe and to relate to him the peculiar incidents connected with it, but when he lost the paper he had decided to wait until he recovered it — or until something more definite developed.

After the race-riot Crowe, who during the past few days had become a very big figure in the raisin-district, called Ward to him and asked if he would like to run the Japanese guard and penetrate that armed camp.

"I am forced to tell you that it will be a dangerous trip," said Crowe; "and if you don't care to——"

"Go?" interrupted Ward. "Of course I want to go. I'd like nothing better."

"——and on the other hand," went on Crowe, "if you do discover anything of importance it will be a big thing."

Thus it was that late that night Ward again found himself before the door of Toku Matsui.

"What you do here, boy?" she whispered, consternation transforming her baby face.

"S-s-sh! Quick!" She fairly dragged him inside, pushed him through the front room back into a second one, a tiny room with a small bed, purple curtains and walls decorated with numerous curios and pictures of Japanese design.

"What you do here?" she repeated. "Why you come? Jap-anese kill you!"

"Oh, I guess they won't hurt me much," he laughed, a little unsteadily; for the extreme fear of the girl was calculated to shake the nerves.

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"You no savvy," she insisted. "Melican come Chinatown, he die. Jap-anese mad—make war. You betta go quick."

"Japanese make war?" repeated Ward, pricking up his ears.

It was for just such information as this that he had come.

"Nevah mine," Toku evaded. "How you get here? Anybody see you?"

"If they did they took me for a Jap. I slipped in from the west side. Sneaked through back lots and over fences, you know. And even then I had to run for it a couple of times."

"Toku 'fraid," she murmured, pondering deeply. "Maybe so you betta go back quick."

"No," he replied; "now that I'm here I'm going to stay a while. I want to talk to you. What's this?—your—why, where have you brought me?"

Toku nodded and with a little embarrassed, hesitating movement of her head she glanced about the room—at her pink silk coverlet, her snug white pillow, her dresser strewn with pins and puffs and combs.

"Sure—Toku litta bedroom," she nodded an apology. "Melican boy mus' hide. Yes, Toku 'fraid."

Truly she was alluring. Ward almost forgot his reason for coming.

"What makes you afraid?" he queried, as if he could not guess.

"I tell you;" lacing and unlacing her chubby fingers. "Jap-anese catchy you, they kill you. You no go back; Toku savvy."

"But why do you care what happens to me?" he maneuvered.

"Toku lika Red-Head—sure."

She looked him straight in the eyes.

No, there was no doubt of it. Toku liked him very much. There was a time when he fancied that she was only playing with him—as he was playing with her—but now there was no doubt that she liked him very much. And he had come over here to play upon that feeling, in order to worm out of her any information that she might possess! He began to feel just a little ashamed of himself.

"Yeh, Toku lika Red-Head," repeated the girl.

As she spoke she curled up on the edge of the bed, steadying her body with the tip of one pink-slippered foot upon the floor.

She was hardly an arm's length from him. They were alone. Not a sound reached their ears from without. The hot blood warmed his face. He liked her, too. He had frankly told himself that before. But he had always added that she was Japanese and that he could never care for her—well, as he might for a certain other. But now he was profoundly shaken.

"You like me better than Osaiki?" he inquired huskily.

"Osaiki? I no lika Osaiki. Lika only white boy—no, white man—brave man!"

He remembered how he had beaten Osaiki and he told her about it somewhat boastfully. Her eyes widened, but she believed and clapped her hands delightedly.

"Red-Head fight lika Jap-anese!" she exclaimed. "Whip Osaiki—ha! ha! Too bad Red-Head no Jap-anese!"

He was carried away by her. The sight of her baby-like softness, the sound of her rich voice, was like wine to his senses. The surroundings, the circumstances, her confession of preference for him, inflamed him.

"And I like you, too, little girl—girlie—Toku," he breathed warmly.

He saw that she was listening with wide-open, triumphant eyes. He reached for one of the soft little hands, but with a sudden gasp she evaded him.

"No! no! You Melican; Toku Jap-anese!"

"What does that matter?" he flashed back. "What does it matter what you are—where you were born?"

"You mally me, boy?"

That gave him a shock. For an instant he avoided her eyes. He had been speaking earnestly. Now, when he spoke, he lied—and he feared that she would detect the false ring in his voice.

"Yes," he declared, "I'll marry you."

He pressed upon her and she did not fight him off. For a moment he held her in his arms, then drew her head up to kiss her.

But suddenly she went to struggling. He laughed joyously and pitted his strong arms against her weak ones. But she struggled more fiercely than ever.

"No! no!" she cried, and he saw that it was not a play struggle. "Wait, Red-Head. Fadah kill brave boy."

"Kill me? Let him try it. I'll do some killing myself."

"Toku no want fadah die. Toku lika fadah."

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"That's all right; I won't hurt him. And he can't hurt me, either. The law will protect me easily enough——"

"No! no! Red-Head no savvy. Fadah come—come with much men. No care Melican law. Plitty soon no more Melican law here; only Jap-anese law. Fadah kill brave boy."

"Pretty soon no more American law here?" repeated Ward. "What do you mean by that?"

He was getting control of himself; he was remembering where he was and for what he came.

"You no savvy?" she warned, frightened the more at sight of his obvious fearlessness. "Speak no so loud. Somebody hear. Sit down—so. Toku tell—tell litta bit. Fadah no Hamagawa, no cigah-fellah. Fadah Shibuya, big war-fellah—what you call it—General?"

"A General? A General in the Japanese army!"

Again Ward felt that sneaking sensation of shame, but he put it down.

"Yeh, Fadah boss all Jap-anese Melica. He plan war—wait ordahs Gov'ment Jap-an. Haf papers, maps; he——"

"Maps? Maps of the coast-cities and their fortifications?"

"Yeh, war-maps; you find one; Toku try take."

"Sure," nodded Ward. "Why, I half believed it all along. And Osaiki—" his mind flitting swiftly over the problems that had puzzled him during the past few weeks—"how about Osaiki? Who's Osaiki?"

"Osaiki big man in Jap-an. Haf big family. Some cousin Mikado. You savvy? Want be big war-fellah. Osaiki come Melica study much college. Now he fight. Osaiki fight nex' big war-fellah to fadah."

"But," pursued Ward, as that scene in Fong Kee's gambling-den flashed before his mind, "why is Osaiki so much afraid of your father?"

"Fadah much boss. Osaiki family leaf Osaiki to fadah. Osaiki wan' be big war-fellah, but he luf gamble—fan-tan—'fraid fadah send back Japan; no more big war-fellah."

"And the Chinamen, too; they're afraid of your father. There's Fong Kee, the millionaire. I saw him nearly fall dead with fright when your father spoke to him."

"Yeh, some Chinamen savvy fadah, know big war-fellah—'fraid—lika make friends fadah—Fong Kee 'fraid."

"But how about this war? When is it going to happen? How? Where's it going to start? Tell me all about it—quick!"

He leaned forward in his eagerness. He saw that Toku knew many things and was in the mood to tell them. So far he had learned nothing—or almost nothing. The vital questions had not yet been answered. Would she answer them?

He believed that she would, but suddenly she caught herself and stopped. She saw that he was not thinking of her, nor even of his own safety, that his mind was upon the facts that she was giving to him.

"Toku say too much," she gasped. "Toku say no more. Red-Head Melican; Toku Jap-anese."

"But think what it may mean," he pleaded, "to me and my people! For God's sake, Toku, tell me everything you know."

She shook her head.

"You savvy what you wan' Toku tell? You wan' Toku tell on Jap-anese, on fadah, on Jap-an. You wan' Jap-anese girl no be true to Jap-an. You Melican; you savvy Toku Jap-anese?"

They were facing each other at close range. Yes, she was Japanese, and he—he was an American. He had held her in his arms. He had almost kissed her. But he had not kissed her. He was glad now that he had not kissed her.

And yet—when he held her in his arms again, when he was kissing her, would she not be more likely to tell the things that he wanted to know—that he *had* to know, for America?

He pressed closer and tried to seize her again; but she held him away.

"No touch Toku!" she commanded. "Toku think—think much. Toku lika Red-Head, but lika fadah betta, lika Jap-an betta. Toku no Melican. No mally Red-Head—no mally Melican. Hate Melicans; hate Melica. Red-Head touch Toku no more. Red-Head go; no come back. Toku be true to Jap-an!"

Ward had seized one of her hands, which she had put out to hold him away. Her fingers were icy cold. He dropped the hand abruptly. She looked toward the door and, reading her thought, he moved toward it. He had lost! He had learned a little—but how little!

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HE STEPPED into the alleyway and did not look back. He heard the door close behind him. He moved down the passageway. Whispering voices somewhere reminded him that he was in danger. He hurried his steps, hugging the shadows and darting through the lamp-lit stretches.

Hearing footsteps behind him, he quickened his speed and dived into a cross-alley. The footsteps came after, quickening also.

Glancing over his shoulder he saw three figures bunched, following. Passing a corner, he broke into a run. A clatter on the brick walk in the rear told him that they were running, too.

He sprinted for the street, but a figure barred his path—two figures. He was cornered. He turned and faced his pursuers—four of them now. They had cut off his retreat. A challenge was hurled at him in Japanese.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Ah, I thought so!" came back in English, the triumphant tones of Osaiki.

The six Japanese closed in on Ward. As the first came within reach, he struck out viciously. His knuckles cracked against a hard skull. He struck out again and again, landing telling blows.

But they were too many for him. One assailant seized his knees and pressed them together. Another secured a grip on his left arm and twisted it until he thought it was coming out of its socket.

Still fighting, he was smothered to the ground, his hands were tied behind his back and a bandage was tightened over his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

OSAIKI HAS HIS DAY

"I TOLD you I'd get you, you red-combed young rooster!"

The bandage was snatched from Ward's face and, blinking his eyes in the uncertain light, he saw Osaiki standing over him. The odor of damp earth rose to his nostrils. Musty boards were beneath his body and a few feet away an oil-lamp sputtered on a box. He knew that his captors had dragged him into a lonely cellar. He looked about for Osaiki's assistants, but he was alone with his rival, entirely alone.

Sharply Ward peered up into his enemy's countenance through the shadow. There was no hope for him there, no sign of pity, nothing but a hot fever for vengeance. He remembered the passionate hatred in the words Osaiki had hurled at his back as he left the amphitheater that night of the celebration.

"I'll get you; I'll get you yet!"

And Osaiki had got him. His hands were tied, while Osaiki was free. Undoubtedly he was far from call of any possible help. Yes, he was in Osaiki's power. What would Osaiki do with him? Toku's warning voice came back to his ears:

"Osaiki jealous you—crazy jealous. He say he do you up. Say find Melican man—kill. You watch."

He was Osaiki's, to do with as Osaiki pleased. He was in the hands of his rival and all too soon was to learn through what avenues the vengeance of a Japanese lover may seek gratification.

Ward peered up at Osaiki and Osaiki glared down at Ward. The dandy seemed struggling to hold back his anger, to keep it within bounds, in order that he might not drink too swiftly of his revenge, that he might taste it slowly, leisurely, a little at a time, relishing it drop by drop.

"So," the dandy permitted himself to speak at last, "you had the impudence to address yourself to my future wife!"

So the shame of the beating Ward had given him counted but little in comparison with his jealousy.

Ward vouchsafed no reply, but plunged abruptly into a series of spasmodic efforts to break the cords which bound him. Osaiki made no move to interfere but stood by chuckling quietly.

"Do I win?" he pricked, when the vain struggles ceased.

"No, you don't," returned Ward, becoming desperate and consequently rash. "I win. Toku Matsui will never be your wife."

"You lie, you lie!" cried Osaiki, with a warmth that betrayed a fear that his enemy was speaking the truth.

"I don't lie," the young American stung again. "Toku will never marry you. She told me so herself. Only an hour ago she promised to marry me, and when I get out of here I'll prove it to you."

He knew that he was lying but, counting everything as lost, he found fleeting pleasure in giving torment to his rival. At his taunt Osaiki's naturally pale face became ghostly white and he struggled again for self-control.

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"When you get out of here!" he laughed harshly. "So you expect to get out of here —alive?"

"Of course," Ward bluffed.

"Why, red rooster, I'll kill you as I wish."

"You don't dare kill me," came back Ward, though his words failed to convince himself. "You know that the American law will get you if you do."

"The American law! Ha-ha! There's no American law here, red rooster. But I won't kill you. No, I'll do something better. I'll leave you to the mercies of our little friends. We'll see if the American law will frighten them. Listen!"

Ward hearkened and there came to his ears a faint sound as of filing wood, then a rustling noise, a thud and a movement of tiny feet scampering across a bare floor.

"Rats!" whispered the Japanese, ghoulishly. "Rats! There are hundreds of them down here—thousands—tens of thousands. They breed by the tens of thousands under Chinatown, and they'll find you. They'll all find you. Rats! Big, hungry rats, with eyes of fire and teeth that tear slowly but never tire of tearing.

"First of all they'll find your face, red rooster. They'll find your ears, your nose, your eyes! You may frighten them for a while by rolling about on the floor. But they'll gather, more and more of them; they'll see that you can not get on your feet, that you can not strike them, and they will fear no longer. Rats! Ha-ha! I'll leave you alone with the rats, for I must call upon Toku to hear her say with me that you are a liar. But I'll look in again. Yes, I'll call again, and you'll be lucky if you can see me then. Good-by!"

Taking up the lamp, Osaiki shoved it into Ward's face and studied his countenance eagerly for signs of fear. The young American gritted his teeth and stiffened his muscles. He thought the lamp would never go. For the moment he forgot the rats and prayed only that Osaiki might leave him alone in his misery. At last the tormentor turned, and with a grunt started up the small flight of stairs which led out of the little den.

Still gritting his teeth, Ward watched Osaiki's disappearing legs. When the lamp bobbed out of sight a flood of impenetrable darkness rushed in upon him. Despite his attempts calmly to await the future he fell into a panic.

"Wait! Wait!" he called. "Come back, will you? Wait—just a minute!"

HUGELY gratified, Osaiki returned, tossing the lamplight in his face again and grinning fiendishly.

"So you like my company, eh?" he gloated. "Want me to sing you a song or tell you a story? Or do you merely wish to urge me to change my mind and save you from the rats?"

Ward was in a panic when he called Osaiki back. He had gone weak and nerveless to the point of complete surrender. He was ready to humble himself and beg Osaiki to let him go, ready to grovel before his victorious enemy, to appeal to his humanity, to any sentiment that might move him, to promise him anything, to cringe, to fawn, to crawl and creep, to spit upon himself, to become a worm—so much did life mean to him, so much did the mere continuation of the glorious act of living outweigh in that moment all other considerations that were near and dear.

But in a moment he was strong again.

"No," he cried, "I only wanted to tell you something that I had forgotten, something that you must know before I die with the rats. I wanted to tell you that to-night, not an hour ago, I held Toku Matsui in my arms. Now go and visit her and ask her if it is not true."

"You?" sputtered Osaiki. "You—held—my Toku?"

"My Toku!" corrected Ward.

"You lie!" shouted Osaiki, beside himself. "You lie! You know you lie! You say that again and I'll kill you myself! I won't wait for the rats! I won't have you muttering that thing down here to yourself when I am gone."

Osaiki whipped a large clasp-knife from one of his pockets, opened it and flourished its glinting blade about in the dim light of the sputtering lamp.

"It's true, all the same," returned Ward, doggedly, but glad the lamp was so dim that Osaiki did not observe the paling of his cheeks.

"I'll kill you myself," went on the Jap, with less heat but more decision, holding the keen edge toward the light and running a testing finger along it.

"If you do you'll hang for it," warned Ward.

"Hang! There you go again with your

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American law. Did I not tell you, red rooster, that there is no American law here? And I'll tell you something more. There'll be no more American law in your whole cursed State, a week from to-night. Do you hear that, dog of an American?"

"Of course I hear, but do you fancy I'm a fool?"

"You're a fool because you don't believe it, a fool just as all other Americans are fools. Not one fool American will believe it until it's done. Fools! Fools! You've sneered at Asia for ages, Asia, which was white-bearded with wisdom when your America—and your Europe—were laid in the cradle. Your civilization was the only civilization; we were barbarians, weak, white-livered, stupid, ambitionless. Might Asia curb the wild dreams of the Occident? Ugh! The heavens would fall at the sacrilegious thought! Fools! American fools!

"True, our wisdom was not the wisdom of warfare, our dreams not dreams of conquest. But now—we have changed! You have brought your game to us. You have taught it to us. You have forced it upon us. We have learned it. We have learned your game and now we're going to play it with you!"

"What's all this you're talking about?" broke in Ward, "this—this rot?"

"You don't understand. Of course you don't understand. You're an American. Was there ever white devil wise enough to look into the soul of a son of Asia? Stupid sleeping Asia! A sleeping giant! Fools! A giant, yes, but a giant awaking, rising, lusting, demanding. If we were asleep, now we are awake. You of the Occident, driven across the world by your ambitions, poked our ribs, and we have arisen to face you. Now we face, now our ambitions clash. The whites, the minority, have ruled the world, or thought they did; the day of the yellow, the majority, has come. You have laughed at us. Now we shall have our laugh—now we shall have our laugh!"

"Pooh!" grunted Ward, but paying close heed, because of what he had heard from Toku.

"Ten fingers has a yellow man—ten," went on Osaiki, "two eyes, two legs, one brain. Has the white man more? A gun is a gun, a ship a ship, no more, no less. Can the white man aim a gun more true or sail a ship more straight than a yellow? And all Asia is one. There is no brotherhood of the white, as there is brotherhood of the yellow. Your countless petty ambitions, drawing this way and that, will destroy you. The world will be ours. For the glorification of the yellow we shall subdue the earth!"

"So that's what you're talking about," sniffed Ward.

"Japan will show the way," continued Osaiki, solemnly, pacing backward and forward in front of his prisoner, sweet revenge for the moment submerged in a sweeter dream of national glory. "China, India—all—will follow. First of all shall we take possession of the sea, the great Pacific, and annex all the lands which that sea washes. And first of all those new lands of the Pacific shall we take the islands that you claim are yours, they and this shore here, this coast of America."

"Pooh!" grunted Ward a second time.

"Pooh it is," returned the Japanese, "pooh—but destiny! Look you; does not the Japan Current, sweeping down upon this coast, point the way to the home of greater Japan—expanding Japan? In Japan to-day are three hundred souls to the square mile; in this west coast country there are two. What is to prevent us from planting a tithe of our millions here? Nothing; not a fragment of an army, not a navy worthy of the name—for the only part of your navy that could give us battle is far away in the Atlantic. You have invaded our own Asia, have sought to steal our markets and snatch the bread from our mouths. You are rich; we are poor. But the sword will reverse the situation. As in ancient Rome, our warriors will bring riches home to Japan until the poorest beggar in the streets of Tokio will be a king. You have taught us your game and we have learned to love it. Warfare have we learned from you; to Asia we are imparting the secret and presently lo! all Asia at our back, we shall turn and destroy our teacher!"

"Destroy nothin'!" declared Ward.

"Hawaii will fall in a day, the Phillipines in three weeks. To land an army on your coast is to capture your coast, and we can land two hundred thousand troops in one body. Why, we who are here already could do it alone. We could do the trick from within—from within!"

"From within?" inquired Ward, breathing quickly in spite of his efforts at unconcern.

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"From within. Don't you know, red rooster, that Japan has more trained soldiers right here on your Pacific Coast alone —trained soldiers working as laborers— than your country has in all the world?"

Ward gasped.

Yes, he remembered having heard that statement before, but for the first time he really realized its significance.

"We have not only the men, but the guns," went on Osaiki. "We have the guns right here in Fresno. The plans are made. The cartridges are in their barrels. In an hour's time we can march out in regiments and companies upon your town. That is what we intend to do, red rooster. And soon—very soon."

"The men and the guns!" repeated Ward, unable longer to conceal the effect of his enemy's words. "Soon! But—but—why, it's preposterous! Japan and the United States are not at war. We're friendly nations. War hasn't been declared. Why, there isn't any cause for war!"

"Cause!" sneered Osaiki. "There are scores of causes. Our government has long been ready with causes. The Anti-Japanese Land-Holding Bill first, of course. And how about your fortifying Hawaii without our consent? How about these race-riots? Causes! And as for war being declared, a declaration of war before the fight is a relic of the Middle Ages. We don't do it. Do you forget that Japan struck Russia her death-blow before war had officially begun? The Japanese strike without warning. I tell you the fall of your country is very near."

With Osaiki's words there came to Ward like a revelation the meaning of many things.

"Why, it might be to-night—this very night!" he thought. "No one suspects!"

As Osaiki, flushed with the fever of contemplation, talked on, Ward forgot his own peril in the danger to his country. He longed to rush out and cry a warning through the streets. He tugged at his cords. Yes, they seemed to have become a little looser. Yet how small the difference! Would it be possible for him to free his hands in time?

If not, there would be no one to warn the people. How much might be saved by a few hours' earlier warning! Why, he might save all America—he, Ward Elder!

"War! War!" he repeated over and over again to himself. "From within! And the Japanese strike without warning. How many lives I might save if I were free! This fellow says they can whip us. I can't believe it, yet suppose they took us unawares? We're unawares. We're asleep. Nobody suspects. Even Crowe doesn't suspect. If I could tell them now maybe they could get ready for these fellows in time. Maybe we could wipe them out. What a chance to do something for my country! If I were only as strong as Samson now, so that I could break these cords, but I can't—I can't!"

"Yes, it may be to-night," he heard Osaiki saying again. "See, red rooster. Look, before I kill you, at the orders, the plans, for the attack all along the coast. I could read them to you, but I won't—no, I won't."

As he spoke he drew a folded document from his pocket, shook it before Ward's eyes, then put it back again, continuing to stride backward and forward in front of his victim.

SUDDENLY Ward's attention was attracted by what he imagined was a sound of light breathing at his elbow. He turned his head quickly, but no one was there. Nothing was there except a wooden wall daubed with green paint.

And yet he was sure that he heard the regular inspirations and expirations of a human breath. Yes, the walls were thin, the panels loosely put together. Perhaps it was an unseen guard, lying patiently on watch to make doubly sure that he would not escape. No, there was no chance for him. He would never see the bright sunlight again—the beautiful sunlight! He would never again extend the power of those matchless young muscles. And above all, his friends, Isola, Crowe, the men and women of Fresno, the whole American nation—they would go on with their life-routine, unsuspecting, asleep, up to the very hour when the brown and yellow hordes of Asia would swoop down upon them!

"Well, your time has come, red rooster," announced Osaiki, suddenly, shaking himself out of his dream of conquest. "Your time has come!"

Jerking a handkerchief from his pocket, Osaiki jumped upon his victim and forced the bit of linen violently into his mouth. Ward struggled and tried to cry out. He knew that none but Asiatics might hear, but he hoped that one of them might intervene to save him or afford him a little more

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time in which to work at his cords. But no sound penetrated the rag. He tried to spew it out of his mouth, but it stuck there, parching his tongue and irritating his heated throat. Absolutely helpless, he watched his captor pull off his coat, hang it on a rusty nail on the rough wall and remove his cuffs.

"That's a thick neck of yours, red rooster," sneered Osaiki, picking up the knife and flourishing it before the face of his prisoner. "But this blade will make it thin. Oh, you needn't try to dodge it. It will only make my work slower. You——"

Osaiki straightened up, listening intently. The blade had not yet touched his throat and a wild flutter of hope came to Ward as he heard the sound of feet descending the stairs. The footsteps halted and a voice called out in Japanese. Osaiki frowned and replied in the same tongue.

"——!" he exclaimed, half aloud, "they want me. But I've got to finish this job. Hey, red rooster, no time for prayers now. Up with your chin—so. Now——"

Again the man on the steps called. This time the youth heard still another voice, a heavier voice, farther away.

Osaiki grunted again. "He'll be coming down here in a moment!" Hurriedly puffing out the light he ran, coatless, up the stairs.

Hardly had the blackness closed in on him when Ward feverishly set to work to free himself. He twisted his fingers and chafed his wrists until they bled behind him. He rolled about on the floor, desperately trying to reach the cords on his ankles with his teeth. From the top of the stairs came the sound of conversation. Every moment he expected to hear Osaiki's steps again descending.

Suddenly there was a light clatter of a falling panel close to his head. A second was removed more quietly. Ward ceased his struggling and strained his ears, chilled by a new horror. Had the unseen guard come through the wall to perform Osaiki's work for him?

CHAPTER XV

UNDERGROUND CHINATOWN

"WHERE you at, kid?" whispered a voice, the most welcome voice that he had ever heard. It was his old friend the hop-head!

He rapped his feet on the floor and the fumbling man found him. Running his hands over Ward's face, he touched the bit of handkerchief hanging from his mouth and seizing it quickly pulled it out.

"Quick—these cords!" sputtered Ward.

In another moment the youth was staggering to his feet. Handsome Jack's hand gripped his wrist and obediently he followed through the broken wall and into a dark den similar to the one they had just left. But he remembered Osaiki's coat and halted abruptly.

"Wait!" he whispered, and, running back, seized the coat from the nail and a second later was again at the hop-head's side.

"You'll have to hurry!" whispered the latter. "In two jiffies they'll be on yer trail like a pack o' hounds."

Out of the second cellar and into a darksome passageway carpeted with soft earth they fled, and on and on by many turns. Now and then they clattered over boards underfoot or brushed against a wooden wall. Often they heard the scampering of tiny feet, but except for the rats and the noises that they made themselves, all was silent as well as dark. They met no one, heard no one. Ward could see absolutely nothing, not even his companion. He trusted himself to the hop-head, following where he led. As they ran, he felt in the pockets of Osaiki's coat, found the document there, slipped it into one of his own pockets and dropped the garment in the path behind him. His one thought now was to hurry, to get away quickly, to reach his friends and warn them against the Japanese.

"Didn't I tell ye I'd make it even with ye?" panted the hop-head, exultantly.

"Thanks! Thanks!" Ward panted back. "You've saved my life; that's what you've done."

"Not yet I haven't," returned the other. "But I'm makin' a play fer it. They may cop ye yet; they may cop us both."

"But how—how on earth did you happen to be here?" Ward could not help asking.

"Had to be in Chinktown just 'cause I had to hit the pipe," replied Handsome Jack. "I was tryin' to dodge the Japs meself, kid, when I run onto you and that bughouse Prince. Haw-law! What'll he say when he comes back and finds his rabbit's gone?"

At last a dull thudding on the soft

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earthen floor ahead halted them. Handsome Jack pressed Ward against a wall and held him there, while both pent their breaths and listened. The sounds were faint, but grew more distinct, and soon Ward decided that they were footsteps. Flattening themselves closer against the wall, so close that Ward fancied the tattoo of his heart upon the bare boards must reveal his presence, they waited.

Ward heard the soft thud of feet upon the earth not an arm's length away, and felt a flutter of air upon his face as the prowler passed, yet could not see him. He thanked his stars that he could not see the man, for that meant that the stranger did not see them nor dream of their presence.

When the stranger had gone, stealthily they began to move on again. But now Ward heard more thuds, thuds of greater number than before; and, besides, he had voices, Japanese voices.

"Gosh all whittles!" whispered the hop-head. "We gotta duck back or be nabbed, sure!"

Turning, they retreated down the path along which they had come.

"I take it fer Osaiki, all right," declared the hop-head. "Guess we gotta fight. No, here's another turn. We'll ditch it down this way."

Feeling his way and with one hand gripping Ward's sleeve, the hop-head slipped into a tunnel opening at right angles off the one in which they had been traveling. Progress was slower here, for the hop-head was uncertain of where he was going. On they fled, along a path as pitchy dark as the bottom of a cave; fled on until of a sudden a rift of light glinted from beneath a door which barred their path.

"They've got me muddled in me nut," announced the hop-head, stopping abruptly. "I ain't wise to where I am at all!"

Turning, he started to lead the way back, but stopped at the second stride. The thudding of feet sounded along the black walls of the subterranean passage, and Ward could hear, too, the voice of a Japanese speaking.

For an instant the two fugitives clutched each other in the darkness, then went frantically to feeling along the sides of the narrow tunnel. They found no opening, but momentarily their sharpened ears detected the nearer approach of the group of Japanese.

"Reckon they's only one way out," whispered the hop-head desperately, "and that's in—in through that door. Follow me—low! low!"

He made for the door and the shaft of light beneath it. Silently he turned the knob and, swinging the door partly ajar without a squeak, crawled inside. Ward pressed close behind and in an instant the hop-head had shut the door again as silently as he had opened it. Without looking to right or to left Ward followed him, crawling on a wooden floor, crawling a dozen yards to a huge box lying on one side, crawling into the box just as he heard the door behind them open and the group of Japanese enter.

In tense expectation Ward huddled in the box, waiting, believing that the Japanese had seen them pass through the door and were on their way to take him. When he had waited for five minutes and they did not come he dared to turn his head and look out through the opening by which he and his companion had entered. He saw nothing but a blank wall and presently he raised his body stealthily and put his eye to a crack on the closed side of the box.

As Ward's eyes devoured the sight on the other side of the crack his body stiffened in rigid wonderment. He was dumfounded, appalled, by the secrets which in a flash the hanging electric lights revealed to him. A few paces away sat a group of Japanese about a table, their heads bent toward the center in earnest conversation. But it was the spectacle beyond the group which seized and held his initial glances.

GUNS—rows and rows of guns, guns crowded so close together that the wall seemed made of guns, guns as far as he could see to the right, as far as he could see to the left, gun-racks loaded with guns, one hundred feet of a cellar-wall lathed and plastered with guns, army-rifles ready for business, bright and shiny as oil and elbow-grease could make them! So Osaiki had spoken the truth.

"We have the men and the guns," he had said. And these were the guns!

Ward gasped and looked away, then looked again, looked and looked until he knew that he was neither dreaming nor gazing upon a cleverly painted wall-picture. His eyes came back to the group about the table. He could hear their voices plainly, could make out the syllables, could have

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told what they were saying were their speech not alien. One voice, heavier, deeper, harsher than the others he could hear most plainly, and now he found at the center of the group the face he was looking for—a massive, stone-jawed face, with pompadour hair and beady eyes, a head set upon a thick neck and supported by a stupendous, rhinoceros-like body. It was Hamagawa himself. And opposite Hamagawa, in profile to him, sat Osaiki in his shirt-sleeves, just as Ward had last seen him when he ran up the steps out of the underground den.

So Osaiki was not hunting him! Probably Osaiki thought him still safe back there with the rats. Or did he know, after all, that his enemy was here? Perhaps even now he was confessing what he had told to Ward, in order to convince his friends that he must be killed at once!

But not for long did Osaiki occupy Ward's fears. His mind sped back to the array of guns upon the wall. He had forgotten that the hop-head was beside him, but now he felt the man at his side, and he was speaking.

"Holy mackerel!" he whispered. "Ain't we got ourselves into it now, though!"

"What does it mean?" Ward whispered back at him. "Wha-what does it mean?"

"Mean, kid? Where's yer head-piece? What can it mean—except that them guns are to shoot us up with?"

"Yes, it means war," said Ward, with an air of finality. "They've all been speaking the truth."

"It's an underground arsenal, kid—and I ain't a bit surprised. Didn't I tell ye they was crazy fer a fight? It wouldn't surprise me if the little bunch o' Japs right here in Fresno thought they could lick the whole United States!

"Wait!" he went on, as Ward started to speak; "they're talking about it now. S-sh! They're callin' the big guy 'General.' General! Didn't I tell ye I could talk the lingo some? And Osaiki—they're givin' him some military name. And there's Matura—that little fat fellow. He's a millionaire—owns the big store. And there's Sato—yes, the little one with the diamonds—the grinning one with the spectacles and the cane. They're all yappin' about it. They've got some papers—maps, from what they say, war-maps——"

"I know; I know;" said Ward. "But quick! What are they saying?"

"They're talking about the attack this minute. I can't get it all, but from what they say they've got guns planted in other burgs on this coast—Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, many places—and men to handle 'em."

"San Francisco?"

"No, not in Frisco; they're talking about taking Frisco with a force from Japan."

"Coming from Japan to take Frisco? I thought those already here were going to do all the fighting—according to Osaiki. He said they were going to try to capture the Pacific Coast from the inside."

"That's the line o' talk they're handin' out. Except for San Francisco. For San Francisco, they're goin' to land north and south."

"But when?" whispered Ward. "When's all this to happen?"

"Hold still! They're yappin' about it now. They got a paper. The Jap fleet is due pretty *pronto*, they say, but on account o' the trouble hereabouts they ain't goin' to wait fer it. Hold on there! They're lettin' out the secret. Two days! Two days more—yes, the big feller says day-after-to-morrow morning!"

"Two days!" breathed Ward. "I've got to get out of here and get back across the track! I've got to get out, if I have to run for it!"

He started to scramble out of the box, but Handsome Jack seized him and held him back.

"Hey, kid, d'ye want to commit sideways right here? Hold yer steam or they'll nab ye in a minute."

Just then they heard a scraping of chairs and, putting their eyes to the crack, they saw that the group at the table had risen. All had their backs to the box and, looking beyond, Ward saw a line of Japanese in ordinary laborers' clothing filing into the room from some unseen entrance farther on. One after another the newcomers came, until there were about fifty of them. They lined up in front of the row of rifles in the racks and at an order from one of their number seized guns and cartridge-boxes and, silently wheeling at a second order, marched out and away by the door through which Ward and his companion had come.

"Why, they're going out now! They're going out right now to surprise the city!" Ward whispered excitedly.

"Naw," corrected the hop-head; "they're

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nothin' but guards. Don't ye mind that the Japs put armed guards all around Chinktown last night?"

"That's so," recollected Ward.

When the company of Japanese had gone the group headed by Hamagawa moved toward the little door, moved through it and closed the door behind them.

"Now's the time to do the rabbit," whispered the hop-head.

Ward peered again through the crack. No, the room was not entirely empty; for back and forth at the far end paced a lone Japanese. He carried a gun on his shoulder and wheeled and turned, sometimes pacing crosswise of the room and sometimes lengthwise. Ward knew that he was a sentry watching over the hidden armory.

For a full five minutes the two watched the sentry through the crack, waiting their opportunity. Finally, as he turned his back to walk toward the farthest wall, Ward and Handsome Jack slipped out of the box on their hands and knees.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PLOT

STEALTHILY they made for the door. The Japanese sentry carried a rifle on his shoulder and Ward felt that he would not hesitate to use it. He steeled his nerves for a report and the whiz of a bullet. His strongest impulse was to rise and dash for the door at full speed and this he did when a dozen feet away, dragging the hop-head after him.

He heard a sharp challenge from the other end of the room. Again he steeled himself for a bang and a leaden ball, yet his movements were all the swifter for the challenge. For an instant, silhouetted in the doorway, he faced the challenger, faced him but did not look up as he reached for the door-knob. Then the door shut behind him and he was running after Handsome Jack. The sentry had not shot him and now, before he could shoot, he must run to that door and throw it open again.

Down the passageway they ran. The tunnel was dark, but not so dark as it had seemed before. Now Ward saw dimly ahead of him for a dozen yards. He hoped to reach the turn before the sentry reached the door. He failed, for, looking back, he saw the door burst open down the dim tunnel behind him.

A third time Ward expected a shot but, instead of shooting, the sentry stood in the door for an instant and shouted, then ran in pursuit, continuing to shout. Like the bellowing of a score of giants vociferating in chorus his shouts boomed through the underground chambers of Chinatown, and it seemed to Ward that all Chinatown must awake. He wondered if Hamawaga and his companions had already ascended to the surface of the earth. If so, they might not hear. If not, they were sure to hear and return to close in on him.

The bellowing of the Jap behind echoed and reëchoed along the walls and tunnelways until Ward imagined that some of the echoes were answering shouts, now from one direction, now from another. In his imagination Chinatown underground was peopled with hundreds of vengeful pursuers and every deeper shadow in the general gloom became the shape of an enemy crouching to spring upon him and his companion.

Throughout the length of the first tunnel Ward led the way, but at the end of it his companion assumed the lead, turning the first corner that presented itself into a third, running in many zigzags in an effort to lose the man upon their trail. Wherever they ran, the sound of the enemy's shouts always found them, but for a time they did not see the man himself. At last they halted before a flight of steps and the hop-head pointed upward.

"There's yer trail," he panted. "Ye'll have to ditch me—me wind is all et up."

"Never!" replied Ward, panting also. "You saved me; now I'll stay with you."

Together they crouched beside the lowest step, but soon they saw a shape moving in the dimness. The shouts began again. Helter-skelter they clattered up the steps, shoved open a door, slipped through and, shutting the door, Ward turned a key which he found fitted in the lock. Pivoting, Ward faced a lean Chinaman sitting beside a shaded red lamp, leaning over a round table strewn with dominoes.

The Chinaman was eying him in amazement, one hand moving snakily toward a drawer at his right. Ward expected to see a weapon flash forth, but that instant he heard the clatter of the sentry's ascending feet behind him, heard a banging on the door that he had locked and a voice shouting. The Chinaman shifted his sunken,

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startled eyes, and in an instant Ward had passed through the outer door behind the hop-head and was in the street.

It was Tulare Street, the main thoroughfare of Little Asia. The street-lamps were still burning, but a gray was stealing over the night, the gray of old age, the gray of approaching end and the birth of a new day. This morning Tulare Street was not as quiet as usual at the hour, for Ward could see human shapes across the street and on the nearest corner eastward stood a group of a half-dozen Japanese. They paid no heed to the two figures leaving the Chinaman's doorway and Ward's chief concern was for the shouting sentry and the suspicious-eyed Celestial within. In a moment the two had crossed the street and were hastening through an alley.

OUT of the alley they slipped and ran toward the real Fresno, Fresno of the wholesome white race. Now they were across Chinese Alley and now in the paling dawn they could make out the railroad-tracks. Somewhere ahead, they knew, there was a Japanese sentinel. But they did not see him. Afar they saw a group of men—a patrol, they thought—but they were not molested. They crossed the railroad-reservation and rounded the freight-shed beyond it.

Little Asia was behind them.

No sooner was the immediate danger passed than the danger of the early future gripped Ward in its full horror. Clutching Handsome Jack by the sleeve, Ward went to dragging him along the street, crying to him to hurry, pouring forth, as he did so, the tale that he had heard from Osaiki in the den of rats. And it was thus that they arrived at the city hall.

They found the young mayor of Fresno in his office, and assembled in conference with him a half dozen citizens representative of various elements of the city's population: Mr. Griffith, President of the Raisin-Packers' Association, who was also President of the First National Bank; Mr. Chester, editor of the leading daily and a prominent politician; Major Scott, commander of the local battalion of the National Guard; Mr. Seawall, President of the Central Labor-Council; a stranger, a distinguished looking gentleman with a gray mustache, square face and vigilant eyes; Crowe, and—was it possible?—the man for whom Ward had been vainly seeking for some weeks, the man of the lottery-den who had stolen the yellow paper.

Without ceremony the red-headed youth and the smoker of opium burst upon this assemblage. Bluntly Ward addressed himself to the one last mentioned.

"What did you do with that paper you stole from me?" he demanded.

"I have it," replied the man coolly. "Why—do you know something more?"

"I do. I know that there's a cellar full of loaded rifles over in Japtown and that the Japs are going to march out and turn them against Fresno."

His words did not bring the response that he had anticipated. There was no excitement—not a word. He gulped, then leaned forward, a tremble in his throat.

"Didn't you hear what I said? A cellar full of—loaded guns—and the Japanese are going to use them—on us! Do you hear?—within forty-eight hours!"

Still there was no perturbation. They sat there with faces of putty, just looking at him. Were they deaf? Or were they all crazy? Or did they know already? He felt a tug at his sleeve and heard the hop-head's voice.

"They think you're nuts, kid; they think you're gone daffy. Don't you see they think yer coco's on the bum?"

So that was it! They thought him crazy! His heart went cold. Perhaps they would lead him away and lock him up, paying no heed to his babblings, permitting his message to spend itself upon the cold walls of the insane-ward at the county jail!

"I believe the boy," interposed Crowe at last. "Let's hear him."

"I can prove what I say," declared Ward, glaring about the circle. "That is, I—I——"

For an instant he had forgotten the document in his pocket. "Anyhow, it's true. Ah! that yellow paper. Mister, let's see it."

The yellow paper was already out of the man's pocket.

"It's only a map," he observed easily, spreading it out on the table so that all could see.

"This is Mr. Fellows," introduced the mayor, condescendingly, "of the United States Secret Service. He has been engaged in investigating the increased influx of Japanese into this country, as well as their methods of entry. And this—" nodding

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toward the stranger with the gray mustache —"is Colonel Benton, of the United States Army. He was ordered to Fresno to look over the situation and determine upon the advisability of despatching troops here from San Francisco to prevent a repetition of the anti-Japanese riots."

"It's only a map," repeated Fellows, "and we've learned about all there is to learn in regard to it. It's a map of San Francisco and its environs, in which special attention is given to the various fortifications about the Bay. True, it was made by a Japanese, but maps of our defenses are frequently made by foreign spies, and it's a hard matter to prevent it. Colonel Benton agrees with me that such maps don't necessarily mean anything in particular."

"Don't mean anything in particular!" flashed back Ward, bending above the yellow sheet. "Other maps of this sort may not, but this one does. Look! See those lines? And those two points, north and south on the coast? What are those two points?"

"That on the south is Monterey Bay," replied Fellows, promptly: "that on the north Bodega Bay."

"Well," said Ward, "these two lines are the lines of march the Japanese will take to capture our chief city. They are going to land at Monterey and at Bodega—and they're going to do it mighty soon!"

As he shot a challenging glance around the circle memory of the document in his pocket came back to him.

"And look at this!" he cried, jerking it out. "Here are the plans—the orders. There is a Japanese army here, here in California now, and it is going to march out upon us—in forty-eight hours!

"What's that?" cried several of the party in chorus.

"Here—read it!" Ward turned to Handsome Jack. "This man knows Japanese. Let him read out what it says."

"Yes, this man reads Japanese," nodded the mayor. "I know him."

EAGERLY the hop-head bent over the paper. For a minute he frowned at the ink-traced lines without opening his mouth.

"——!" he blurted out at last. "The dirty yellow skunks!"

"What is it? What does it say? What?" All spoke at once.

But Handsome Jack waved them aside and read on, stopping only, now and then, to discharge a volley of curses. He read the paper through, then sank into a chair and cursed some more.

"—— 'em!" he exploded. "They're goin' to try it. Why, I'll fight 'em myself. I want to be the first to enlist against 'em. Will you gimme that honor, Colonel?"

"That's not in my power," replied Colonel Benton shortly. "But come, read out that paper and be quick about it."

The document seemed plainly to be an authentic set of military plans from which could be educed the general plot of the Japanese. The scheme was almost exactly as Ward had pieced it together from all the things that he had seen and heard. The entire United States Pacific Coast, excepting alone San Francisco and the adjacent country, was to be capturrd from the inside—by Japanese soldiers already sojourning upon United States soil. Simultaneously with the movement from the inside was to come the disembarkation of one hundred thousand Japanese troops at Monterey and Bodega Bays, who would march immediately upon the forts about San Francisco from the north and the south. Once the Coast was subdued, all mountain-passes joining the Pacific Coast States with the land beyond the Rockies were to be seized and fortified, additional troops were to be rushed from Japan as fast as the vast transport-facilities of that country would permit and preparations were to be made to hold the territory for an indefinite period.

Meanwhile operations were to be directed also against our islands. A force of fifty thousand men was to be landed in two sections, one at Lingayen and the other at Pollilo Bight, whence they were to converge upon Manila. Expeditions of auxiliary naval craft were to be sent to take possession of Alaska and the Canal Zone, while the transformation of Hawaii from an American territory to a Japanese possession was to be left wholly to the seventy-five thousand sons of Nippon who had already made those islands their home. Not a single foot of territory fronting on the Pacific Ocean was to remain under the Stars and Stripes.

As the magnitude of the plot dawned upon the men about the table all turned pale. There were a few minutes of rather hysterical discussion of devastation and massacre and the hopelessness of resistance. It was cut chort by Colonel Benton.

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"Gentlemen," he broke in, "enough of this. This thing may mean war, and it may not. It may be a false alarm, a hoax, for all we know. The point is, we've got to be on the safe side. Pending orders from my Government I'll take charge of the situation here. We must arm. We can not expect any Federal troops to be sent to Fresno. Fresno must take care of herself, like the other cities of the Coast. Mr. Mayor, I shall ask you to see the chief of police and the sheriff at once. See that they scour the city and county for firearms. If any are left in the stores, take them and waste no ceremony about it. And swear in special deputies, as many as possible.

"Major Scott, your men are already on duty. Assemble them on the plaza this morning at eleven o'clock—and bring all the extra guns you have in the armory. Mr. Crowe and Mr. Seawall, you have your work cut out for you, too. It will be your task to turn your laboring-organizations into fighting-machines overnight. Gather all your men and all available arms at the plaza at eleven o'clock this morning.

"And remember, everybody, tell no one what this is for—yet. The people must be kept cool. And we must throw the Japs off the scent. If they learn that their plot is discovered they may march out upon us sooner than they intended. Go, all of you. I shall inform the Government of what we have learned."

Colonel Benton turned to ring for a messenger and his eyes fell upon Ward Elder. For an instant he forgot his pressing duty.

"Young man!" He laid a hand on one of the muscular shoulders. "If your story proves true you will have done a tremendous service to your country. Forty-eight hours' warning may not avert war, but it may mean the saving of thousands of precious lives; it may even mean the difference between defeat and victory. You have warned us against the Japanese; now will you help to fight them?"

"You could not prevent me from doing it if you wanted to," Ward answered.

"Good—but you will never be permitted to fight as a private soldier. I can assure you that the Government will have more important work for you."

"Thank you," nodded Ward, taking the hand that was held out to him.

CHAPTER XVII

AMERICA AWAKENS

THE United States took the first steps in preparation for war. In the absence of final proof of a Japanese plot, every move was made under cover. There was no formal declaration of war and no public call for volunteers, yet everything was done that could be done without too greatly arousing the suspicions of Japan, which was still openly treated as a friendly nation.

Fragments of a regular army in various sections of the country were suddenly galvanized into life and got ready for travel. Secret orders were issued requiring the militia of every State to place itself in readiness for an emergency call. All over the Pacific Coast, companies of men were quietly formed under the direction of municipal authorities, and a sudden demand for firearms made itself felt from Lower California to British Columbia.

In Fresno, because of the state of the public nerves, as well as on account of the large body of unemployed created by labor-troubles in the raisin-industry, preparations were more extensive than in other localities of the same density of population. Two thousand men, including the local companies of the National Guard, were lined up at noon of the first day, were formed into companies, officered and given an initial drilling, though arms had been found for fewer than half of them. By the second day, largely because of the vigorous work of Colonel Benton, assisted by Scott and Seawall, this number had been doubled.

It was considered extremely necessary to find a public excuse for mustering such a large body of men, an excuse calculated to mislead the Japanese, and this Colonel Benton did by announcing that they were for the purpose of preventing further race-riots and guarding the lives and property of subjects of Japan from the assaults of American citizens. The pretext, however, was not sufficient for the Americans. The mass of Fresno's citizens had no ambitions to do military duty to protect the alien Japanese and, in order to raise a defensive force, it was necessary to give out hints of what was in the air.

Following the assembling of Fresno's rough-and-ready army on the first day, camp was established in one of the city's

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parks, the line of pickets between Fresno's Little Asia and Fresno proper was not withdrawn and Colonel Benton held his men in readiness for an immediate defense. Osaiki was surely cognizant of the fact that Ward Elder had escaped with the Japanese secret and Osaiki might dare to confess his indiscretion to his superior, in which case it was possible that Hamagawa might lead his hosts out upon the city before the appointed hour, in order to allow it no time in which to prepare for defense.

The United States Government might have obtained final confirmation of Ward's tale by exploring the catacombs under Fresno's Chinatown or the Asiatic section of other cities of the coast, but such an exploration it did not think it wise to undertake, desiring all the time possible in which to prepare, and fearing that a discovery of the plot would only cause the yellow panther to spring the sooner.

Despite the fact that Colonel Benton and his Government guarded Ward Elder's discovery so well for twenty-four hours that not a newspaper in the land published a line about it, on the second morning all the leading papers throughout the country hinted in page-wide head-lines that the United States was on the verge of war with Japan.

THE scare-heads suggested alarms of every conceivable sort, and there were columns on columns dealing with every possible question and contingency that might arise in case the nation was actually on the precipice of a death-struggle with the yellow warrior of the Orient. It was all there, all the story, all the sensation, all except the final clinching fact—the certainty of war.

Mysterious preparations on the part of the War Department had been discovered. Another significant fact that was exploited to its full news-value was that since the previous evening all cable-communications with Hawaii, the Philippine Islands and Japan had been cut off. One correspondent went so far as to surmise that Japan had already gone to war and was moving to strike a crushing blow even before the formal hostilities had been declared, as she had done with Russia. He surmised that the Philippine cable had been cut and that Japan already was in possession of Hawaii.

A second correspondent pertinently inquired what had become of the main body of the Japanese war-squadron, calling attention to the fact that its whereabouts had been unknown to the world at large for something like a month. He reminded the public of rumors that had been current a month previously of tens of thousands of troops having quietly embarked from Japanese ports and suggested that half a hundred transports carrying an army and escorted by a Japanese fleet of war-vessels might now be on its way to the Pacific Coast by an unfrequented route without a single American being cognizant of the fact.

He pointed out that, for all anybody knew, Japan might possess a secret coaling-station on one of the Christmas Islands, in the South Seas, and another on one of the Galopagos, west of Ecuador, and that a route taking in these islands would be highly favorable and practicable for a secret expedition across the Pacific—and favorable to an attack on the Panama Canal.

Interviews with famous war-experts were published broadcast, interviews that, in nearly every case, were gloomy. A famous hero of the Spanish war, retired, contributed a sensational article to prove that once in possession of the Pacific Coast country, Japan could hold it, not only against the armies that a nation as wealthy and patriotic as ours might raise in the course of years on years of preparation and privation, but that it could hold the land from the Rocky Mountain passes to the sea against the combined armies of the white race and for all time. Japan, said he, would be the undisputed mistress of the world's greatest ocean and consequently of all the lands bordering on that ocean. Seizing and fortifying every island of strategic importance, she would stand for generations a menace to European civilization in the Western Hemisphere. It was not impossible that she would choose even to extend her conquest over the whole of both Americas, and in time push the last of the white race back over the Atlantic to overcrowded Europe, whence it came, thus reclaiming, after more than four hundred years, the land first discovered by pilgrims from her own Asia, centuries back in antiquity.

And so the nation was shaken quite as much by the prospect of war as she would have been by the actual announcement. Suspense racked the Republic to its foundations, for the first twenty-four hours ended in uncertainty. War was not yet.

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The afternoon of that second day Ward Elder stood, hat in hand, before the busy desk of Colonel Benton at his headquarters in the City Hall. Again the Colonel had sent for him—the fourth time in thirty hours. Probably the Colonel wished to go with him still another time over the things he had heard and seen in that long night he had spent in Japtown.

As he waited, his thick red hair tumbling in choppy, unparted waves over his bare head, a uniformed messenger-boy slipped past him and deposited a yellow envelope on the table in front of the Colonel. Before the first messenger was out of the door there came another, who also deposited a yellow envelope upon the table.

Colonel Benton picked up both envelopes in his hands and tore them open together. He read one and then the other and then read each one again and shot a glance around the room. Except for the waiting youth he was alone.

"It's come!" he exclaimed, addressing himself rather than Ward. "Thank God the suspense is over!"

"What's come?" ventured Ward, stiffening.

"The news—confirmation of the whole plot. A fleet of one hundred vessels has been sighted off the coast south of Monterey."

"But might it not be something else, some other——"

"Impossible!" declared Colonel Benton. "It can be nothing else than an invading-army from Japan."

"So," observed Ward, evenly. "They're really coming! Well, I guess we'll give 'em a fight, ready or not ready."

The door opened quietly and Crowe stepped into the room.

"The *Record* has just received a despatch saying that the Japanese fleet has been sighted off Monterey," Crowe announced. "They're going to print an extra with the story. Does it matter?"

"Let them print it," returned the Colonel. "In fact, you may as well give them the rest of the story, too. The sooner the people know the whole truth the better, now. Give them the story and with it the announcement that a call has been made for volunteers—that enlistments are wanted quick, and to apply here. We've got to assemble a stronger force yet, if we're going to cope with the enemy there beyond the railroad-tracks. Thank God we had the warning that we did! Young man—" turning to Ward—"that brings me to my reason for sending for you. I've just received a wire from Washington—in reply to one of mine—appointing you a captain. 'Ward Elder, Captain of U. S. Volunteers!' How does that sound, eh?"

"It sounds—well," returned Ward, "but isn't it a little unusual? Why, I don't know anything. I can handle a gun, but I know nothing of the duties of an officer."

"We'll teach you," returned the Colonel. "If we're going to officer all the recruits whom it will be necessary to gather together then we'll have to do with some mighty green officers. Captain Elder, report to me again in an hour."

Ward descended the wide stone steps of the City Hall. He felt immeasureably weary, strangely old. His hours in the dungeon with Osaiki, when he had hung by a single thread over the black abyss of death, those minutes of sharp suspense with the committee in the mayor's office, the excitement of the past three days, had left their impression upon him.

THE sunlight was soft and warm, an afternoon breeze stirred his hair and only then did he remember that his hat was still in one hand. He put it on his head and slipped his hands into his pockets.

He reached the bottom step and strolled aimlessly along the street. He met men whom he knew and there was perturbation in their faces, but he avoided them. Handsome Jack, the hop-head, came upon him unexpectedly.

"Hello, kid!" he cried. "Hear the news? We handed it to 'em straight, didn't we? We're going to mix it with the little skunks, and mighty *pronto*, too. And Yours Truly's a-goin' to pack a smoke-wagon with the rest o' the Americans. No more o' the long pipe and velvet fer yer uncle. It won't be no bed o' roses fer an old stiff like me, but I guess I c'n be as square a patriot as the next un. This little old country needs me, and I'm there with the goods—see!"

Perfunctorily Ward replied in kind, his voice seeming apart from him, like that of another person. The hop-head passed on and Ward wandered to the court-house park and sat down, but soon rose and went to strolling aimlessly again. The weight of the

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three days' terrible tension still hung upon him like a black cloud. Among the events of that three days his last parting with Toku Matsui was now one of the farthest in the background of his consciousness. She was a tempting bit of a woman, yes. She had made his heart beat faster. She had invaded his dreams. But she had not struck deep. She had been more of a diversion, a passing stimulant, like a draft of wine which intoxicates for the moment, but which, in an hour, is gone. Like the intoxication of wine, her spell over him had come between the deeper, stronger current of feeling that was in him only momentarily. Now there came back to him another face——

He saw it now—Isola Kent. She was coming toward him on the street. Face to face they met and stopped. Not a strand of that sun-gold crown was out of place, and the coolness and sanity that had always struck him so forcibly in the past reached out to him now, swept away the mists from his eyes and put a new rod of steel into his back-bone.

"What's the latest?" asked the girl.

He hesitated.

"You don't need to tell me," she announced, scrutinizing his face. "War!"

He nodded.

"And are you going to fight?"

"Of course," he answered. He remembered the first talk they had ever had, when he had declared that he longed to do battle for his country, but he did not feel moved to remind her of it.

"Then you're going," she spoke half in abstraction; "going to hear the whir of the bullets, to face the roaring cannon, the shining bayonet, going to war!"

"Going to die—most likely."

He smiled.

He noted the swift concern in her eyes, noted that instead of a general concern for her country it seemed to be a solicitude directed wholly toward him personally. He remembered that she did not realize how imminently war threatened herself, her family and friends. A moment before he would readily have told her, but her anxiety for him was too grateful a draft. He was unwilling to share it with others, with those for whom she would fear did she know how close above their heads hung the sword of the Mikado.

Ward's eyes roved skyward. A large American flag was rising slowly on the mast above the Federal building. In awakening curiosity he gazed at the flag. The Stars and Stripes! Heretofore they had been to him chiefly an emblem to wave on holidays, a banner to carry in a street-parade; a mere plaything. But now—now he was actually seeing them for the first time!

"Oh!" Isola followed Ward's glance.

She stepped forward and put a hand on his shoulder. Only that, but it affected him like a fresh breeze blowing on his forehead on a hot day. It drew him out of his dazed condition. The red blood of youth and perfect health was once more flowing through his veins. How good she was to him!

"Think of it!" she exclaimed abruptly. "To be a woman, only a woman! To be a woman and have to sit and wait, only to wait. I wish I could go, too. Why can't I? Isn't there something I could do? Ah! there's the hospital! I'll go. Yes, I am going with you!"

The shout of a newsboy crying the extras of the day drew their attention. Ward extracted some change from a pocket and took the papers. As he spread the first one open Isola peered eagerly over his shoulder at the head-lines. Breathless, he held it for a moment, wide open, then crumpled it hastily.

With a little cry Isola snatched for the paper, but he held it away from her.

"That's Crowe's work," he growled; but he could not hide the fact that he was pleased.

"Please; please," she begged. He handed her the paper, she spread it open herself and this time he looked over her shoulder, shamefacedly.

"Ward Elder!" she breathed, "you—'unearthed plot'—'gave authorities warning'—'commissioned a Captain'—'act of heroism'—you—why, you're already a hero!"

She turned and faced him. He forgot his embarrassment to gaze into those cool skies of jade-green. She was affecting him now as she had always affected him, but more profoundly so.

For a minute he faced her, frank admiration in his eyes, then started violently, as if awakening from a dream.

"But why am I stopping here?" he cried, "when for us the world may end to-morrow?"

He seized her hand and gripped it swiftly, then turned and half ran toward the headquarters of Colonel Benton.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE WHITE

THE Pacific Fleet of the United States concentrated off the coast south of San Francisco, and waited for the war-squadron of Japan. The plan was to give immediate battle unless the strength of Japan in ships and guns proved to be overwhelmingly great; in which case an engagement would be avoided. The slower auxiliary craft would retire to the protection of the land-batteries commanding the Golden Gate, while the others would take to the sea and, until the arrival of America's main fleet from the Atlantic, attempt to cripple the Japanese by cutting off their lines of communications with their home-base. Every report, as the squadron of Japan steamed up the coast from the south, made it more certain that our Pacific Fleet was far too weak to give it battle.

Meanwhile news was flashed from Asia, *via* Atlantic cable, that the Asiatic fleet of the United States was preparing to face a slightly superior Japanese fleet, which was in the act of convoying troop-ships to the coast of Luzon in preparation for the march upon Manila.

At the same time the people of San Francisco suddenly discovered that their city had been depopulated of Japanese, while all other cities on the coast awoke to the fact that armed camps of Japanese had sprung up in their midst overnight. Like the people of Fresno, with what forces they could muster in a day, they faced the enemy across a distance of less than pistol-range. As for Hawaii, it was entirely cut off from the world, and no one could tell what was happening there.

Such was the situation on the second morning after Ward Elder's discovery of the secret arsenal under Chinatown. Farther east, troop-trains were beginning to hurry away over the transcontinental railroads. Militia-companies were assembling in every State. The morning papers contained the President's call for half a million volunteers to serve for one year against Japan. The ordinary business of the nation was suspended; there was no business of the day except the business of war. A wild military frenzy, fearful yet eager, enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, heroic, flamed over the country. Such was the patriotic fury that the mobs would have torn limb from limb any one who so much as hinted of surrender or retreat. The people fought for places before the bulletin-boards to await news of that first bloody clash.

On that second morning there were a hundred points of contact between the United States and Japan, a hundred places where, with little or no warning, the first shot might be fired, the first blood spilled, the first blow be struck in the death-battle of the two champion nations of the Pacific, white and yellow. The world at large held its breath and waited.

AND then, in that very instant, a new circumstance hurled itself into the arena, a circumstance that caused the world to sit back and gasp, at first, then, as the purport of the thing was revealed, to toss its hat and cheer—at least the white part of the world; for no one except the patriotic American but feared, when the figures were laid before him, that the issue was fraught with gravest danger for America and all that it represented in the world's progress and civilization.

The new circumstance was a new fleet of battleships steaming upon the waters of the Pacific, steaming down the coast of California—a fleet flung out in battle-line, hurrying to the side of America's Pacific fleet, facing with it the approaching squadron of Japan.

"What fleet is it? Where is it from? Whose can it be?"

For a long half-day the world, depending only upon the hazy reports from California, asked the questions, its jaw hanging loose in blank amazement.

Then the answer came; came straight from London—and it was then that the white part of the world threw high its hat and cheered.

"It is a British fleet," was the answer, "a British fleet from Esquimault. The main squadron of the United States not being able to reach Pacific waters in time to engage Japan, Great Britain will perform the service for her. Great Britain has been friendly with Japan, but when it comes to an issue of the white against the yellow, the white civilization against the yellow civilization, then Great Britain has no choice. All white men are brothers! His Majesty's Government suspected a Japanese plot against America and quietly massed a naval

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force in the Pacific, not to aid Japan, but to oppose her. Though America may wish to repel the Japanese alone, Great Britain will not permit it; the issue is too profound. The Occident is for the white man; the yellow man must stay in Asia!"

So the white world threw up its hat and howled. Great Britain found that she was not alone, that all the great white nations were with her. France, Austria, even the old rival, Germany, joined in the demand that the Japanese squadron go back across the sea without landing a soldier or firing a gun.

"Any grievance that Japan may hold against the United States she must submit to an international court of arbitration; we will enforce this ultimatum with arms."

Such was the concerted fiat of the European powers. In the face of impending calamity to one of their number, the white nations of the earth were brought closer together than ever before in the earth's history. Thus was taken a long step toward the final realization of the Brotherhood of the White.

For one day more the world hung in suspense. For a day the armed forces, white and yellow, on American territory, faced each other at pistol-range. For a day, the fleets of the United States and Japan threatened each other in Asiatic waters, and those of Great Britain and the United States were near to grips with that of Japan off the California coast. Only the long-distance wireless headed off a bloody conflict. Fierce diplomatic messages flew back and forth. Japan had planned long and cunningly for a rape of new territory and a glorious career of world-domination launched through a brilliant war with her rival across the sea—and she was loath to yield.

But the opposition to her was overwhelming. For a day it seemed as if she would defy them all, but she knew that the Yellow was not yet ready for a struggle with all the White. Sullenly, after wringing an agreement from the United States that there would be no reprisals, no prosecution of Japanese plotters on American soil, she withdrew.

THE world breathed once more. Again the white nations shook hands all round. And the American people, for the first time, awakened to their military and naval needs.

Out of California and the Pacific Coast States there began at once a hegira of Japanese for their native country. They were not forced to go, but they knew that it would be more healthy for them to go. Hamagawa, who was General Shibuya, went, with his daughter Toku; with Osaiki, who was Prince Kotu, and with the rich Japanese who had already been planning to profit hugely by the conquest of the coast-country.

The Japanese raisin-pickers went, most of them, and within a week following the frustration of the Japanese plot Fresno was almost depopulated of Japanese. The vineyards were cleared, the packing-houses were cleared. Presently white men and women were picking grapes for two and one-half cents a tray and the old packing-house-workers were back at their jobs.

DURING those stirring days of feverish preparation for war and of suspense, Ward Elder had seen Isola Kent many times, but always briefly. A short word, an instant of half-embarrassment; such had been their meetings. But at each meeting Ward had felt himself drawn more irresistibly toward her. Always those jade-green eyes looked straight at him, looked through him. He was sure that she read his every thought, even the thoughts of her that came to him when they were not together. He was sure that she knew that he was thinking of her, what he was feeling for her, and he wondered what were her thoughts of him and what her feelings.

Briefly they had met during those stirring days, but now, when the life of Fresno was turning back to its old course, the issue between them came quickly. He had found occasion to call at her home a time or two in the past and, to-day, as the cool twilight of Fresno's Autumn wiped out the memory of the day's heat, he turned from the gravel sidewalk through the front gate and stopped, half diffidently, as she came out on the porch to meet him. He took off his hat and held it in his hands, his great shock of bright red hair showing mussed, as usual, above his clear blue eyes. She sat down opposite him.

"So quiet—so very peaceful," she breathed, feeling the velvet touch of the evening.

"Yes," he said, "I'm glad now that we didn't have to fight them."

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"Glad!" she came back, "a thousand times glad. Glad for you—and myself."

He glanced at her quickly.

"I mean," she hurried a little, "glad that there are no hospitals—and no poor maimed fellows in them."

"Well, we beat them, anyhow!" he said, with a sudden rush of enthusiasm.

"Yes," she nodded, "I guess the union won't be needed any more; at least, not to fight the Japs.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, after a moment.

"That's what I came to talk to you about," he replied, suddenly embarrassed. "You know, I've lost my job—as Captain of Volunteers."

"Yes? And then I'll see you back in the packing-house?"

"Oh no," he shook his head emphatically, "no more packing-house for me. I've lost my job as Captain of Volunteers, but—they're going to give me something better."

"Fine! What's that?"

"Why, they've put me in the regular army, with rank of second lieutenant. First, I go to Fort Leavenworth, and then I hope to get into the aviation end of the game. I'm going to learn to fly the coming battle-ships of the air!"

"Oh!" she clapped her hands; "but—isn't it terribly dangerous?"

"No," he declared confidently; "they're getting those things pretty well in hand now, you know. Anyhow, it's more fun if it *is* a little dangerous. It's doing something special, you know. Why—" his voice vibrated with boyish enthusiasm—"it will be great!"

"Then I'm glad," she said, but with a flicker of fear still in her eyes. "As for me, I'm going back to work in Sarkelian's."

He sat up suddenly and very straight. "No, you're not," he declared; "you're—going with me."

She broke out into a delicious, half mocking laugh. It was just as she had laughed when she made sport of him that first time there across the table at Sarkelian's. As then, its effect was to stiffen him. He moved closer.

"Yes!" He was very positive about it. "Do you suppose I'm going away off there without you? I've been counting all the time on taking you. I want you——"

Her voice rippled out again, in that same half-mocking way. "Such a little, little boy!" she mused.

"I'm twenty-two," he came back, a little fiercely. "I was twenty-two yesterday, and I know what I want. You've been awfully nice to me, and now you've got to pay the penalty. You're not going back to Sarkelian's—ever. You're going with me. No, don't laugh. I want you—right away. I want you for my wife."

He moved closer, as close as it was possible for him to move. The twilight was past now, and the night gave its consent. She was laughing still, but the mocking note, in spite of itself, was dying out and giving place to a purely happy one.

"Well, of course, you're the nicest boy I ever met—and the reddest-haired. But so young!"

Her fingers twined through the thick red hair, mussing it worse than before.

"Yes," she said; "yes! yes! How many times will you make me say it? Now you're not letting me say it!"

THE END

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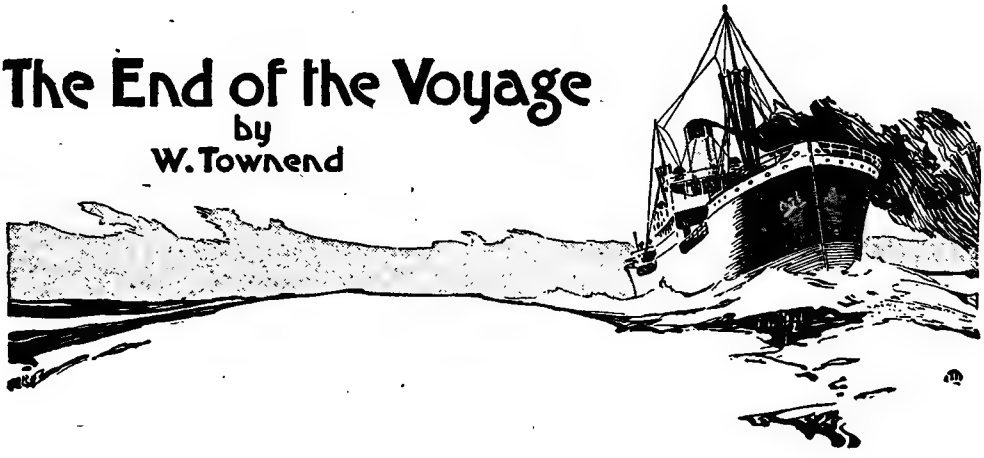
The End of the Voyage

by

W. Townend



THIS is a fragment which with a little care might have been made into a story. And the story would have told with much detail how a ship arrived in port after many weeks at sea; how the Captain of that ship, sick with anxiety and suffering, journeyed home; how one dusk he stood at the gate of a small house with wind moaning in the bare branches of the trees and snow-flakes falling; how he walked up the path, slowly, for he was very tired, and how the door of the house was thrown open and he saw his wife smiling at him and then, as he clasped her in his arms, how he forgot his fears and all the pain and torment of the voyage and thought only of the future.

What follows, however, is but a portion of the whole story and tells of the sea, a ship and some sailors. And the ending is happy or not, just according to the way you look at things.

II

ON a cold wet Winter's afternoon the *Silver Streak*, a tramp steamer, with twisted iron-work and three boats missing, wrenched and battered and scarred by many gales, red with rust and with salt-incrusted funnel, rolled sullenly through the ground-swell of the North Atlantic.

Five men in yellow oilskins and sou'-westers were standing on the steamer's bridge; unshaven, grimy, haggard men who stared over the waste of waters into the gloom and tried in vain to make out what lay before them.

For nearly a month on end, half frozen by ice-cold spray, half starved, worn-out for want of sleep, they had fought the wild rage of the Western Ocean, grimly and without hope, day after day, until it had seemed to their wearied minds that Fate was mocking them and that the *Silver Streak* was doomed. And even now, though the wind had dropped and the green seas no longer swept fiercely over the fo'c's'le-head, each of these five men wondered in his innermost heart what fresh disaster might be in store.

One of the deck-hands, a big Swede, wiped the rain from his eyes. "Ain'dt we neffer to stop rollin'? I ban sig of it."

"You ighn't the only one," whined the man next him, a small, sharp-featured Cockney. "You ighn't the only one by a long chalk. We're all sick of it; every muvver's son of us. I wish to —— I was syfe at 'ome."

And at this the Captain of the *Silver Streak* who stood by the side of the mate glanced quickly at the three men huddled together at the other end of the bridge.

"A miracle she ighn't sunk long ago," said the Cockney, "when yer think wot the old thing's 'ad to put up wiv. A perishin' wreck—that's wot she is."

The Captain wrenched nervously at the high collar of his oilskins as though choking, and once more peered over the canvas dodger into the gloom.

A miracle! He pondered over the word, repeating it to himself dully. A miracle! Yes, of course. There were few ships that would have escaped as easily as had the

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Silver Streak, he knew, and a faint smile crossed the lean, weather-worn face.

"'Oo says oilskins keep oud der rain, eh?" grumbled the Squarehead. "I ban ved to der sgin."

And later the Cockney roused himself sufficiently to answer with a little yelp of irritation.

"Yah! You an' yer skin! Wet! So's everybody. I never want to see or 'ear or think of this 'ere stinkin' Western Ocean agyne; nor this old tub neither." He paused for a moment and then went on again, more to himself than to the others: "Slow! Gawd 'elp us, yus! It's enough ter drive yer mad. Pensacola twenty-seven dys ago, an' 'ere we are yet. An' I suppose we'll go blunderin' along, foolin' arahnd. . . ."

"Oh, dry up!" said the bo'sun. "Dry up, an' don't jaw so much. We won't be home any the sooner for that kind o' guff."

And as the Captain listened he clenched his fists in sudden agony. Home! What right had *they* to talk of home? What home did they know but a bed in some sailors' boarding-house and a seat in a barroom where they could drink themselves drunk night after night in peace, until their money was all spent or stolen. Home meant nothing to them, and yet they could talk of it as though——

But the whining voice of the Cockney broke in on his thoughts.

"D'yer think that deck-cargo of ours'll shift any more? We ought to 'ave jettisoned the 'ole lot while we was abaht it. I never seen such a list in all my life."

"If it does shift," said the bo'sun very deliberately, "if it does, mind, we won't have to fret no more about gettin' home, an' there won't be no need for me to be heavin' the lead all day to-morrer, neither."

The Captain shivered and the mate, grizzled and gray-bearded, his senior by many years, heard the sharp intake of his breath.

"We couldn't have weathered another blow like the last, sir, that's a certaint'," he said, gruffly.

"What's that, Mr. Bentham?" The Captain came to himself with a start and nodded. "Aye: the worst's over. I wonder——"

"Yes, sir?" said the mate.

"Oh! nothin'."

"Pity we didn't have a glimpse of the sun to-day," went on the mate after a short silence. "Dead reck'nin's all very well, sir, of course, but——"

He watched the Captain from under his shaggy brows and a curious rush of sympathy came over him as he took in the younger man's bent shoulders and blood-shot eyes and the deep lines in his face that had not been there when the *Silver Streak* put out from Pensacola.

"We're gettin' close," he mumbled; "too close to be comfortable," and the Captain thrust out his lower lip and nodded.

"Aye," he said at last. "We're gettin' close, Mr. Bentham. But we're nowhere near yet—nothin' like."

"But," said the mate, "how do we——"

And while he hesitated, unable to frame the question that was troubling him, the second mate, a big, broad-shouldered young man, clambered up the ladder and he turned swiftly.

"What's the matter, Mr. Jones?" he asked.

"Tea-time," said the second mate. "The glass is still risin', I see." He stretched himself and yawned, and then as the ship rolled far over to port he gripped an awning stanchion and laughed. "Lord! Some day we'll turn right over, upside down. We've an awful list on us. Wish we could——"

"Tea-time is it," said the Captain slowly. "I'd be obliged, Mr. Bentham, if—if you'd tell the steward to fetch me a cup of tea in —in the chart-room. That'll be all I'll need."

"POOR old Johnny!" said the second mate when they had heard the slamming of the chart-room door beneath the bridge. "Tea, is it. That's about all he'll get on this packet, anyhow. The old man's lookin' pretty rotten, isn't he?"

"I'm not surprised," said the mate. "I'd be lookin' as bad if I was him."

"Worried about the old ship, eh? Well, what's the good o' worryin'? We're as much lost as the babes in the wood. It's no use tryin' to pretend we're not, Mr. Bentham; we are. We don't know whereabouts we are, nor does he. You can't go takin' a broken-winded, undermanned old tramp like the *Silver Streak* across the Western Ocean in January, and in weather like we've had, on dead reckonin', an' not expect to lose your bearings."

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"No," said the mate, "but—it ain't that. It's his home *he's* worryin' about most. Three kiddies an' another due. Aye, born by this time, perhaps. Who wouldn't worry? And his missus! A pretty little woman she is too. I knew her when she was a slip of a girl in West Hartlepool, running about with her hair down. She's been sick a-bed, he tells me, on an' off, for the past four months."

"Tough luck that," said the second mate.

"When was it we left home?" continued the mate. "Twenty-fifth of July, weren't it. An' now it's February all but two days. You notice him careful, next time you see him, an' try an' recollect what he was like when we put out from Cardiff six months ago. You wouldn't think him the same man, would you? No, not by ten years. It's worry what's done it; just worry. He wants to get home as quick as he can, an' he'd stop at nothin'. He'd run any risk, if it'd help him save a few minutes. I tell you, Mr. Jones, I've seen men taken that way before an', between you an' me, I don't care for it at all."

And the gray-bearded, leather-faced mate of the *Silver Streak* looked in through the wheel-house window at the clock and then struck two strokes on the bell that hung under the triangle of the pole-compass.

"Proud he was, too, of the ship," said the second mate. "His first trip as skipper, eh, Mr. Bentham?"

The mate nodded.

"Aye; your first ship an' your first love! You'll have others, maybe, but it's your first that you'll bear in mind all the rest of your life. I lost both o' mine, an' now—now I'm mate of the *Silver Streak*."

He broke off with a hard laugh.

"I hope we get clear weather by mornin', an' the sun," he said. "I'm too old to like this blindfold, hide-an'-seek business anywhere within reach of the Channel. It may be Ireland or Cornwall or the Scillys, or France even. God knows, but you don't an' I don't."

And then having given the course the mate left the bridge and made his way aft over the deck cargo of timber.

ALL that night the Captain kept his place on the bridge and at four o'clock, when the mate climbed the ladder to take the morning watch, he found him peering into the blackness. For a while he gazed at him without speaking.

"Had any sleep?" he asked finally.

"What's that, any what?"

As though awakened from some dream the tired man swung round, moistening his dry lips.

"Oh, it's you, is it? I didn't—didn't know the watch had been changed. Sleep! No, I'm not sleepy, Bentham."

There was no wind now and the rain had ceased, but the *Silver Streak* still rolled in the swell and the noise of the cranks in the engine-room came through the open skylights *phoom-tah, phoom-tah, phoom-tah* very slowly and wearily.

The mate, outwardly unconcerned, lit his pipe and by the flame of his match the Captain's face showed up out of the darkness, with hollow cheeks and unshaven chin and eyes that were wide open and bloodshot and full of dumb suffering like a sick animal's.

"You're dead beat; that's what's wrong. When did you last get any sleep?"

And he spoke, not as a mate to his Captain, but as an equal.

"Any sleep!" said the Captain resting his elbows on the rail. "I'll get all the sleep I want when we reach port."

"Hadn't you better turn in a while?"

"No. I'm all right, Mr. Bentham; I am really. I must stay here—on the bridge."

The mate swore softly to himself. "Can't *I* look after things? I lost one ship, I know, but can't I be trusted for an hour or so with this? There's no need to run any risks——"

But the Captain interrupted fiercely.

"It's not that, an' you know it; not that at all. I'd trust you anywhere, but—no, it's no good, Bentham. I can't explain. My head's aching so I couldn't explain anything. But I've got to stay here. Time drags badly enough as it is."

He walked to the end of the bridge and stood peering into the night. Then he came back again.

"It's a hard life this, Bentham; a cruel, hard life. Not for us—I'm not grumblin'. Hard on the women, I mean. I'd never let a girl of mine marry a sailor—never. I've two, you know, and a boy. ——! Bentham, I wonder——"

The thought of his wife silenced him, and he quivered.

"It won't be long before you're home now, sir," said the mate quietly. 'It's

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clearing up, an' we'll have the sun this noon; certain to. Then we can push ahead—safely. Wouldn't it be better to—to, er—slow down a bit? There's no knowin' how near land we are, and——"

"Near land!" said the Captain. "What put that notion into your head? Near land! We're not within a hundred and fifty miles of it. I wish we were."

And he pitied himself for having a fool for a mate and tried to think of something to say that would teach him his place, until with a pang he remembered the man's story and was sorry.

For more than two hours neither spoke and then, soon after four bells had struck, the Captain heard quick footsteps and the mate telling him gruffly to look aloft. And when he had lifted up his eyes he saw shining through a gap in the clouds a solitary star.

"Kind o' makes it not quite so lonesome, eh, Mr. Bentham?" he said.

From the fiddley rose the voice of the Cockney deck-hand. "Look at that there blinkin' star! Now we'll 'ave the sun, an' then—please God!—this blasted voyage'll soon be over."

"Aye," said the mate, "that means we'll have the sun by break o' day. See! You can make out the clouds thinning."

BUT the mate was wrong. Shortly before dawn, while it was yet dark, there came fog; a thick, wet, swirling fog-bank that blotted out the sky and the face of the waters.

The Captain of the *Silver Streak* laughed harshly and grasped the handle of the telegraph. But he did not ring it.

"What's the good?" he said and his hand dropped to his side. "We're goin' less than normal half-speed now. No use in doin' what we've no need to do, is there?"

He pulled the cord over his head and a moment later the whistle spluttered and blared out its melancholy warning, to which there seemed to come back a multitude of faint echoes, ghostly and unreal.

"Put a couple of men on the fo'c's'le-head, Mr. Bentham," he said and paced to and fro, stopping occasionally to peer into the gray void that surrounded them.

After a time the mate gave a dry cough.

"Could have done without this fog, sir," he said in an uneasy tone.

"Yes, Mr. Bentham," said the Captain, "we could. But we needn't let it make any difference."

"There's such a thing as takin' unnecessary risks, sir," continued the mate with stubborn persistence. "You know—well, I don't know as how you do know, but it was through a fog that—that I lost the *Elba* an'——"

The Captain stiffened.

"Aye, is that so? I'm sorry, Mr. Bentham, very sorry indeed. No one likes a fog, but the sooner we're through it the better. It's gettin' light now, an' we'll——"

"Sir, will ye not take a sounding an'——"

But the Captain turned on his heel and strolled to the opposite side of the bridge, his hands deep in his pockets. And the *Silver Streak* thudded on her course, pushing her blunt nose through the thick gray cloud of fog that eddied and whirled past with no sign of lifting, while the whistle hooted mournfully at two-minute intervals and the engines rumbled *phoom-tah, phoom-tah,* more slowly and more wearily than ever.

A few minutes before eight o'clock it happened.

Out of the invisible came the thin hammering of a cracked bell and the blowing of a horn. The whistle shrieked its question, clamoring for an answer, and the Cockney stationed on the fo'c's'le-head waved his arms and shrieked a frantic, useless warning.

"Oh ——! We're on top of 'em!"

The *Silver Streak* did not even so much as quiver. There was a noise of splintering match-wood, a faint, despairing wail, and the reverberating, protesting *clang—clang-clang* of the telegraph as it was jammed hard down.

"A fisherman," said the Captain in a choked voice. "A fisherman an' we've smashed him to bits. Mr. Bentham, get that life-boat out, if you please."

THE *phoom-tah, phoom-tah* ceased, and the *Silver Streak* rose and fell sluggishly in an uncanny stillness.

At the mate's shout, dim figures loomed out of the fog with lumbering footsteps. Three deck-hands, the bo'sun, the carpenter and two firemen scrambled up the bridge-ladder and fiddley and flung themselves upon the port life-boat, the only one of the *Silver Streak's* boats that had been spared by the North Atlantic. The second mate

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arrived, bareheaded and out of breath, buttoning up his jacket as he ran.

"Stir yourselves! Don't crowd!" said the Captain impatiently. "Mr. Bentham, can't you manage——"

"Aye, aye, sir."

The canvas cover was torn off, the bolts slipped, and the men heaved and tugged as they guided the boat carefully between the in-turned davits.

"Shove, now!" shouted the mate. "Back there, steady! Now—out! Shove, oh, shove! Round with that davit—*hi-hup!* Now *together;* get it round, can't you? Oh, ——! Here, let me."

"Hurry!" said the Captain. "Can't you hurry!"

The boat swung free at last, hanging outward, and the second mate and four men climbed in one after the other.

"Let her go!"

The falls squeaked in the blocks and the life-boat dropped swiftly and unevenly, smacking the water stern-foremost.

"All right, Mr. Jones, are you?" asked the Captain.

"Aye, aye, sir," said the second mate, and then came a brief order, "Give way, now," followed by the creak of oars in the rowlocks.

"Run into a fishing-boat, eh?" said the chief engineer. "That's bad. Aye, varra bad."

On the bridge stood the Captain with his head bent and his arms folded, resting on the rail, listening, watching, waiting. His throat was dry and parched, he could scarcely swallow, and from time to time he shivered as though cold. It had been no fault of his—of that he was positive. How could it be? Yet in his ears there rang the echo of the one strangled cry. He wondered how many had been killed—if any had been saved. The thought sickened him.

The minutes dragged slowly in a dull silence broken only by the clanging of the bell on the fo'c's'le-head, and the *lap-lap* of the water on the hull.

Men clustered on the bridge-deck and spoke in whispers, and snatches of their talk reached the Captain.

"Ya, Chordie, an' we gut him in doo. I ban in der vo'g's'le an' I hear dem gry. It vos yust like——"

"Yus," said the Cockney, "an' all with Dyvy Jones by nah. After wot we've 'ad—them weeks. . . It's a rum go, ighn't it? Comin' across the Western Ocean, all that wy, just to smash up that pore blighter!"

"I'm glad it wasn't some other feller runnin' into us. It wouldn't take much to sink the *Silver Streak*, anyhow. *Hullo!* what's that?"

The mate muttered, "Isn't that the boat?" and the Captain held his breath and caught the faint, regular grating of oars.

"*Silver Streak*, ahoy! We've got one of 'em!"

"Any sign of the others?"

"No sir; all gone."

The mate spat reflectively.

"H'm! now I'd give a good deal to know where we——"

"—— you, Bentham!" flared the Captain, "drop it! Drop it at once! Understand! I've had enough of it," and white and shaking he descended the ladder.

The boat came alongside, and a limp, drenched figure was handed up and placed on the tarpaulin-covered bunker hatch.

"Hopeless about the others, I suppose, Mr. Jones?" said the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said the second mate. "Hopeless."

"All right. Get the life-boat hoisted in sharp," and he bent over the injured man, who lay with closed eyes and ashen face. He was an elderly man dressed in rough fisherman's clothes, a woolen muffler, oil-skins and sea-boots, and across his forehead was a jagged wound from which the blood trickled, blurring with the salt water.

The Captain of the *Silver Streak* shuddered.

"Steward, get some lint an' the dressings from the cabin, an' you'll find the balsam in the locker in my berth. Make haste!"

He listened dully to the singsong voice of the bo'sun: "Heigh-o *hoop!* Heave-her *hoop!* Hyar-*hoop!*" and the squeaking of the blocks as the boat was hauled up. Then he started suddenly as though some one had asked a question.

What were they waiting for? Time was precious: why waste it? He tried to think, and then glanced up at the bridge where stood the mate, motionless, staring ahead into the impenetrable fog.

THE chief engineer passed him, holding in his hand a tumbler of raw spirit.

"Here, this'll put some life into him. Aye, mon! but that's a nasty cut."

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"Now then, old chap," said the second mate and forced open the clenched teeth.

"Steady on!" said the chief. "Raise his head. You're spilling the stuff."

The steward arrived with the bandages and the Captain slowly climbed the ladder. He grasped the handle of the telegraph, and paused—irresolute, undecided, doubts crowding in upon his mind. He knew that the course lay straight before him. There could be no mistake, but he hesitated, unnerved.

From below came the murmur of voices.

"No, ye foo'; don't tie him that wa'. Take a toorn under the chin. Here, gi'e it here."

"I know 'ow it should be done. This way, then down an'——"

"You're doin' it all wrong, steward." This was the second mate. "I told you so. Now clear out an' let the chief have it."

The mate shuffled his feet and again the Captain reached for the handle. Then he hurried off the bridge and joined the group on the deck beneath.

Presently the man on the bunker-hatch opened his eyes.

"That's richt, mon!" said the chief. "Ha' anither soop!"

They poured more liquor down his throat, and he coughed it up feebly, gazing at the ring of strange faces from under the bandages.

"How are you now?" asked the Captain.

The fisherman did not answer. His lips quivered and he put his hand to his throat.

"You're English, aren't you?"

"Aye—let me——"

He stopped, and they waited for him to speak, whispering uneasily among themselves.

"God—God in Heaven!" He struggled to sit up, and the second mate put a strong arm around his shoulders and supported him.

"Out of the fog—black an' red an' wet—an' the little numbers—the little white numbers."

His voice broke in a high wail and with awakened memory came madness.

"Both of them—both——" And he sobbed brokenly. "My poor little boat! What good against they iron ships? —— yeou!" he cried, fighting for breath. "—— yeou, you murderers! What were you abaout? Did you not hear me shouting? Did you not hear our bell? An' yeou goin' through the fog like as if—— Oh, my God! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Cheer up, old chap!" said the second mate. "You're—you're alive, you know, an'——"

"Alive! Aye, an' would I were dead! Our little boat; our little, little boat! An' yeou—yeou butchers! 'Tis short shift for we. And I saw them crushed to death, drowned. . . . Oh, what shall I do? An' me left to face their wives, an' yeou not carin', no. . . . Yeou —— iron murderers, where were you goin' to? Where did you reckon you'd be?"

"Whereabouts are we then?" asked the second mate.

"Where—where you'd no right to be—no —— O God, help me!"

He buried his face in his hands and cried like a woman, his whole frame shaken, while the grimy, tired men of the *Silver Streak* stood around, pitying and wondering.

SICK at heart, the Captain turned and made his way back to the bridge. At the head of the ladder the mate met him.

"Can you hear anything, sir? I dunno' —— it seems like I could hear——"

The fo'c's'le-bell clattered dismally, the *Silver Streak* gave a little to the swell, the water lapped against the iron hull, a gull flew by calling sadly.

"Hear anything!" said the Captain. "What should I hear? We're wasting time, Mr. Bentham—wasting time. We'll be pushing on——"

But as his hand touched the wet brass, the mate sprang forward, clutched his arm and shouted incoherently, his voice ending in a screech.

Through a clear lane in the fog, in a gap, flung wide open for an instant, the towering mass of a granite cliff showed straight ahead.

The Captain of the *Silver Streak* swayed to and fro, his blood-shot eyes full of horror, his face drawn and colorless.

"O God!" he whispered. "Merciful God! And but—but for that poor little boat—I'd ha' lost my ship; my first ship."

Then the fog came down once more.

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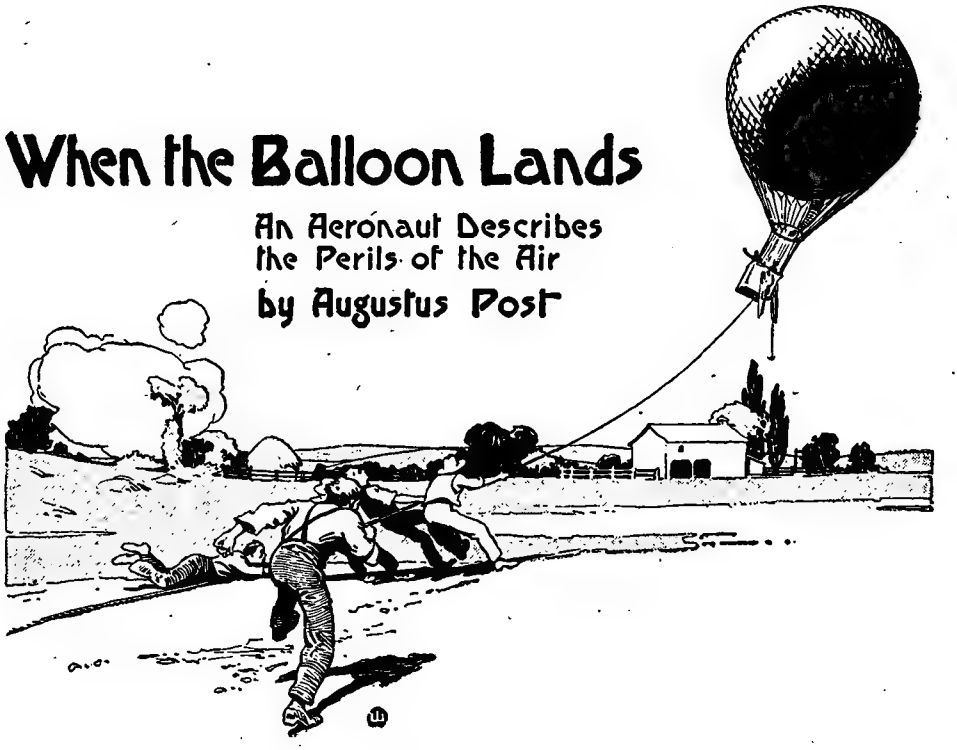
When the Balloon Lands

An Aeronaut Describes the Perils of the Air

by Augustus Post



THE easiest thing to say about navigating the air is that the only dangerous part is coming down. It is also the oldest thing that can be said. The first man to fall off the top story of the Tower of Babel no doubt explained that he did not hurt himself when he fell but when he landed.

The heavier-than-air aeroplane always tends to come down; but the balloon, being lighter than air, has a tendency to stay up, and the pilot must maneuver it down. This is by no means quickly done. At a height of twenty thousand feet it will take from one to two hours to descend comfortably. To be sure, I did once come down three thousand feet in a little over two minutes, but that was when the balloon burst over the city of Berlin, and gave Mr. Holland Forbes and myself some of the quickest thinking of all our lives.

The balloon of course parachuted enough to keep us from coming down like a shot, and, as we threw out everything we could reach, we struck with only enough force to send us through the tiled roof of a house.

But though it remains the most interesting landing that I remember, it is one that I do not recommend as a model. No, the usual method of landing is for the pilot to make up his mind at least an hour ahead, usually longer, and pick out a place a long distance beyond, for the balloon will not go down straight, but at a long slant with the wind.

The choice of landing-places is wide, for the theoretical range of vision at twenty thousand feet is about four hundred miles. Though of course it is less lower down, it is still much greater than any one realizes on the surface of the earth.

Choosing a landing-place and reaching it are of course two different things. Often there are air-currents to pass through on the way down, invisible rivers of wind that deflect the course of the balloon.

The closest landing in which I have ever taken part was one near Edina, Missouri, when, after a trip of two days, we descended and were dragging our guide-rope along over the ground for nearly ten miles before we finally came to rest, within a quarter of a mile of the railroad-station that we had selected.

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This dragging guide-rope always acts on the man below as a string pulled along affects the nerves of a cat—it has to be a pretty old cat not to try to catch it. So the impulse to seize the dangling cable overcomes men old enough to know that it is something like trying to hold on to the tail of an active boa-constrictor.

This time it dragged over roofs, sending the people out to see what could be the meaning of thunder from a cloudless sky rattling over their heads, and leaving them staring after the rapidly disappearing monster.

As we approached a farm-house two young boys scattered at the sight of something as big as a barn coming at them through the air, leaving an old man, with flowing white hair, butternut overalls and a broad-brimmed straw hat, undisturbedly tying his frightened horses to the gate-post.

As we came over his head he tipped back his smiling face and called to us, "I ain't askeered o' nothin'!" We were going so slowly that Mr. Harmon, the pilot, asked him where the railroad-station was, and when he told us eight miles farther on in the same direction, we went there as directly as if in an omnibus.

The foreign participants in the first Gordon Bennett race in this country landed two balloons within a hundred yards of the Atlantic Ocean. As they had come from St. Louis, and as going out over the ocean would have been the end of them, it will be seen that their maneuvering had been very delicate.

This maneuvering is done of course with sand, which is thrown out—not as the comic papers like to say, in bags, but a little at a time, using a sugar-scoop. The aeronaut has every reason to throw out very little at a time, for upon the amount of ballast he can save depends the duration of his flight, a matter of greatest moment in a cup-race. Supposing, then, that the end of his journey is approaching, and his ballast is depleted, he will try if possible to tide over the late afternoon and keep up till night, although night-landings are so much more difficult, for the earth, being so much warmer then than the air, heats the gas and sends the bag up again, so that it may keep bouncing up and down for hours, perhaps all night, without the use of any ballast to speak of.

But if he can keep up, away from the earth's surface, his chance of continuing his journey through the whole night, and maintaining a good equilibrium by using only a very little ballast, is still more favorable.

The first downward movement is to open the valve and let the gas slowly escape. The balloon starts at a speed that must be checked and controlled by throwing out sand-ballast, regulating the process by the very delicate instruments for registering the height of the balloon with which modern pilots are equipped. The old-style pilot of course went by rule-of-thumb with sometimes startling nonchalance, as in the case told me by a friend of mine of one who, upon seeing the gentle rise from throwing out a very little sand, said suddenly, "Let's see what a bag will do," and, to the anguish of my friend, sent a bag over the side. The balloon climbed five thousand feet like a shot!

The long-distance balloonist saves from two to four sacks of ballast for landing-purposes, especially if he has any idea of coming down in rough country thickly wooded and full of lakes, or near large bodies of water.

I have landed with much less. Indeed, on one trip with Mr. Hawley from St. Louis to Indianapolis, we scraped up the very last grain from the crevices of the wicker-work basket, so that when we finally came to earth there was not so much as a spoonful left in the balloon.

But Mr. Hawley has actually come down without any, depending upon the parachuting effect of the balloon. This was in France, though, where they do this more often than we do, because they go constantly in balloons, for pleasure and on short trips, not as in this country, where almost all the ballooning that counts is done in long-distance races, and where the landing-conditions are so different.

WITH COUNT DE LA VAULX

I REMEMBER on the very first trip I ever took, the pilot was Count Henri de la Vaulx of Paris—whose world's record for long-distance flight, eleven hundred and ninety-three miles, stood until this year. When we landed after a day's journey, the car, settling comfortably to the ground, tipped over on one side, and Count de la Vaulx said that not once in forty trips would we have such a rough landing.

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No doubt true, under the régime and in the district of the Aero Club of France, but I wonder what he would have thought of being dragged along the ground by a cyclone for mile after mile, through barbed-wire fences and telegraph-lines to the accompaniment of deafening thunder, as Mr. Harmon and I landed in Iowa!

It is hard to get a picture of a balloon-descension, for the good reason that a photographer is rarely on hand. The balloon goes up from the center of a crowd. Sometimes the band plays, anyway the cameras click. But it comes down again at the point where gas resigns to gravity, and in a cup-race, no one, not even the pilot, knows exactly where that will be.

It may be, as in the case of the record flight of the balloon *America II.*, with Mr. Allen Hawley and myself in 1909, somewhere so far from civilization that the balloonists may return to wonder why they never realized before how many people would miss them.

A LANDING IN THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS

THIS time we were out for the Gordon Bennett Cup, and when the wind began to carry us out over the Great Lakes, and then beyond, above what seemed one vast expanse of forest and lakes, we were greatly elated to find ourselves in the track that promised the longest line possible upon the map of North America.

The first notion we had that all might not be well was when some wood-choppers, of whom we asked the way, shouted up to us, "Come down, boys, for —— sake. You're going straight into the wilderness, and you'll never get out alive!"

It did look very quiet down below; the air so blue and clear, no smoke anywhere in sight, not so much as the tiny thread from a camp-fire, and not a sound, not even from the roosters, whose crowing comes up so loudly and from such great distances from the sleeping earth to the floating balloon, before the dawn. Only the quivering call of the loon, the loneliest sound imaginable, or the occasional noise of the hoot-owl, came through the clear silence.

At last we did think we had done our duty by the record and, seeing what looked like farmhouses on the shore of Lake St. John in the distance, we started down in order to land as close to them as the cross-currents near the ground would permit. It was nearly night before the balloon came to rest, in a great pine-tree half-way up the side of a mountain fifteen hundred feet high, for when we were half-way down the storm that had been driving us with it broke in full fury and drove us some thirty miles farther before we could settle down, the basket securely wedged among the rocky ledges, so that we could get out in safety.

The first thing any one learns on going in a balloon, even as passenger, is that the one absolutely unforgivable thing and the most dangerous thing of all to do is to get out of the car before the pilot gives the word, for the balloon, suddenly released from so much weight, would bob up again, carrying along the helpless persons inside. Not until the balloon is absolutely "dead," without one bit of bounce left in her, does the pilot give the word. The inhabitants of the basket then get out, and shake hands—an indispensable formality on the completion of a balloon-trip—thank their lucky stars that they are once more on solid earth, where, the old lady said, there was less *terror* and it was more *firmer*.

We had to leave our balloon looped over the branches of the pine-tree, but we packed up a few things to protect them from the rain which was coming down in floods. Lightning struck several trees near-by and we decided it would be better to crawl under our tarpaulin cover and sleep in the basket.

Next morning we started out to find the farmhouses we had seen before landing, which we thought, not realizing the speed of our last rush, must be close at hand. As we made our way down the mountainside and plunged through icy streams and the deep tundra moss of the swamps, over the decaying trunks of fallen trees, such as turned over on Hawley's leg and injured it, or climbed over slippery, lichen-covered rocks, sometimes wading, more often swimming, we realized what landing in the wilderness meant. In this case, we knew, it might mean staying there until all the rescue-party would find of us would be our bones.

When we came down in Berlin I had a camera along, and could take pictures almost as soon as we struck, but this time we had no such means of recording the strange still beauty of the scenes through which we passed—silent lakes, from which wooded cliffs rose sharply, and hills—

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mountains they seemed to us—whose summits never knew the foot of man. Trappers and fishers have only skirted their edges.

I was very glad when a gentleman who has hunted in this district, reading in the newspapers of our journey, sent me photographs of Lake Sotogama and the Saguenay Mountains on beyond, in which I could easily recognize, even though at a distance, what Mr. Hawley and I saw then. At last, on the seventh day, we came upon a trapper's tent. After waiting there a day and a night, we hailed a canoe coming around the bend, bearing two habitants from one of the frontier-settlements, out on a trapping-expedition.

After that, getting back was easy—the canoe, then the rude caleche of the pioneer, then the little provincial railroad, then the flying express, then a high-power automobile to see the aeroplanes fly for the Gordon Bennett Cup—thus in our journey tracing the history of locomotion in America.

HOVERING IN A DIRIGIBLE

LANDING in a dirigible is a different matter. The one-man dirigible, the only kind I have ever navigated, has really to be pulled down. After the propeller is stopped and the air-ship approaches the earth, a dragging-rope is caught by the attendants or by a large body of cheerful volunteers, as many indeed as can get hold, while the aeronaut rides just over their heads back to the hangar.

The dirigible, unlike the free balloon or the aeroplane, can move up and down perpendicularly and hover for as long as necessary over a given spot, so that I remember thinking, as I hung in the air over a football game in Jackson, Mississippi, what a good position it would be for a coach. Perhaps we may yet have aero-umpires for baseball. They have them now in the West for automobile track-races, to watch the drivers on the turns and decide questions of fouling.

One must learn to run a dirigible by the simple and exciting method of running it. You can not get the trick on the ground. I remember that after a few directions Captain Baldwin turned over his air-ship to me for a trip, and I found myself several hundred feet above the crowd in no time, as somebody says, "standing on a ladder under a soap-bubble," as if I had always been there. Indeed, when I had returned to New York and was caught in a block on Fifth Avenue, I had a curious feeling that I ought to move back and send my automobile up into the air and sail up over the crush of vehicles. One always has this feeling about an automobile after running a flying-machine. Once used to driving a vehicle designed for three dimensions it is hard to come down to a vehicle which is limited to only two.

The easiest way to land with an aeroplane is on the ice, as I did after my first trip in one at Lake Keuka. The surface is so smooth that there is practically no jar, and for the amateur it is ideal, as one may even slide sideways on its surface without accident or breakage. It is landing, of course, that makes repairs so expensive for amateurs, and that is one of the reasons why it is so much better to learn over water, especially in a hydro-aeroplane or flying-boat.

On the same lake this year—1913—I came down from a soaring, dashing flight with Mr. Glenn Curtiss so rapidly that it seemed, as we dropped, that we would surely strike the water with a great splash. But, at the last moment Mr. Curtiss deflected the lever, the machine rose a trifle, skimmed just over the surface and slid into the water so gently, that with my eyes shut, I would have thought we were still in the air, shooting along in a cloud of spray, until she rose out of the lake and came to rest on top of the dock.

AEROPLANE THRILLS

THE amateur may not have so much fun out of landings as the expert, nor get as much glory, but he certainly does get more excitement.

Once, at Sheepshead Bay, I took out my machine late in the afternoon, for a practise-flight, "grass-cutting," with the usual result that the professionals hastily got their machines under cover for fear of collisions, or flew to the other end of the race-track.

Not knowing how to turn around in the air yet, after a short straightaway flight I hopped out, without stopping the engine, caught the light machine in my hands, turned it round, hopped in again and started back, to the great amusement of the gallery, especially of the newspapermen, for news had been light that day, and they were able to state that I had leaped

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out, righted my machine and leaped in again, leaving it undecided at what height I had performed the feat.

Apparently the story traveled far, for I have been asked many times just how I stayed up during my absence from the machine, and I take this opportunity to remove an undeserved suspicion from the reliability of gravitation.

But the queerest aeroplane-landing I ever had was in that same novice-period at Sheepshead Bay, when I came down so near Mr. Ely's machine that I was sure I could not stop before I would run into it, and probably smash it.

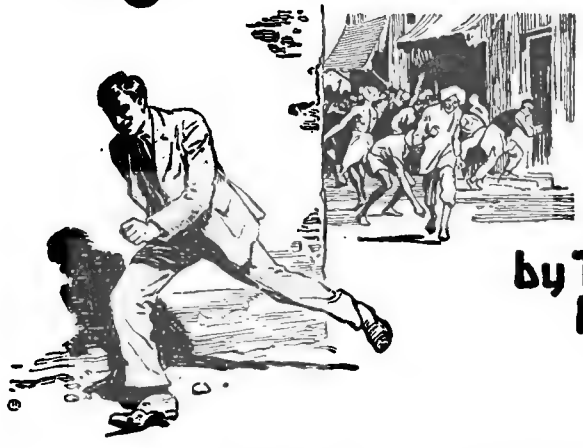
So I sent my aeroplane up again as sharply as possible, and then, to get down again on the crowded track, with trees and hurdles, grand stands and people, found myself learning all at once the whole art of aeroplane-management and simultaneously putting it into practise. I cut circles and figures of eight, I banked so sharply on the curves that the machine slid way from one side to the other, I did things that in reasonable moments I would never dare to think of doing, using every control to the limit, with a good deal the same impulse that makes a fish in a globe cut capers when water is poured in—to keep right side up.

At last I came down, as uninjured as a sleep-walker, apologized to everybody in sight and awoke next day to find that Mr. O'Malley had written so picturesquely about it in the *Sun* that I had a reputation for broncho-busting in an aeroplane.

This reputation traveled far enough for Mr. Curtiss to send me a telegram from the West, "*Don't try to learn everything at once.*"

But straight aviation, even at the hands of irresponsible amateurs, has no thrills any more since a young acquaintance of mine has taken to standing on the rail of his aeroplane at a dizzy height and leaping off as if from the Brooklyn Bridge, with a two and one-half pound parachute tied to his waist. He still lives. Apparently nobody wants him in the other world.

In a Righteous Cause



by Talbot Mundy

THE "Nil Desperandums" were at Oozepore, which in itself accounts for nearly all of what happened; for, according to the Army's account of it—and the Army has had plenty of experience, and ought to know—Oozepore was made before the materials for creation had been standardized and brought up to sample.

There seems too much in the way of experiment about the place for Thomas Atkins, who likes to have his quarters and their surroundings "according to Cocker" and "so-fash." He is not in the least interested to know how hot a place can get without making human life impossible, nor how many scorpions can be made to breed to the square mile.

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He knows that the original serpent of the Scripture came from Oozepore, and left behind him a most tremendous progeny and a host of already tempted heathen; and he knows, too, that the yellow-greenish mists that rise round Oozepore at dusk and dawn are the day's created blasphemy condensed.

These facts have been forced on his attention, but otherwise he is not inquisitive about the place. The everlasting wickedness and sameness of it wearies him, and if he had his choice he would prefer the purlieus of Port Said, or Burgash, or some other city that is, comparatively speaking, innocent.

But Thomas Atkins never gets his choice. The civilians in the bay-windowed, electric-lighted offices at home choose for him. So the Nil Desperandums, who have a record that should entitle them to some consideration, had been learning what despair meant, at a temperature of one hundred and eighteen in the shade, for two hot-weathers past. They were a regiment still—a proud and pipe-clayed fighting-unit, and not a mob. They still spoke of native Bachelors of Art and Maharajahs' sons as "heathen," and they still had steam enough to turn out eight hundred strong to watch a dog-fight.

There was a canteen, of course, at Oozepore, and a brewery in the distance. There was a nice, clean temperance reading-room, supported by the dear old ladies and the missionaries, and supplied at varying intervals with year-old magazines. The men patronized it frequently when funds were low.

Then, there was the bazaar. It was an unusually unspeakable bazaar, and ought to have been always out-of-bounds. It was big, and mazy, and ill-smelling, and not even the native gentry knew quite how much evil got its hatching there. You could name any evil that you liked, and shut your eyes, and turn round three times, and discover it.

There was a Salvation Army depot there, of course; they choose all the worst places, and send home most of the stories about Tommy Atkins's turpitude. And there was a "Hotel for Europeans Only," run by a low-caste Hindu, owned by a Parsee and closed rigidly against the British rank and file. And there were pariah dogs, and sacred apes (which nobody might shoot) and temples by the dozen, which you might go into if you had a permit—and strength enough to tolerate the smell.

But the canteen was the chief attraction. There a man could at least drink beer as long as his money lasted; and after that he could walk along the dazzling white road to his hut, and swear at the *punkah-wallah* and curse himself to sleep on his regulation three-by-six-foot cot.

Once asleep, he could dream himself in England, with the good, clean Shorncliffe gravel crunching underneath his feet, and the breeze from the English Channel tousling the fringe of the good, clean English girl who walked beside him.

But the canteen had to come first. A man couldn't dream dreams like that in Oozepore without a gallon or so to help him do it.

IT WAS in the canteen, two days after pay-day, that Piggy Wimpole sat, with his elbows on the table, and a gallon-jug between him and Farmer Wells, who sprawled opposite. "Farmer" had got his pseudonym because he had turned up once at Shorncliffe with some straw sticking to his tunic. He had claimed that it had blown on to him from a farmer's wagon and, because he was a good soldier, the Colonel had accepted the excuse. But no one in the regiment, from the Colonel downward, ever believed the story for a second. He was a big man, from the Luton leather-district, and he felt the heat more than Piggy Wimpole did. He had to sprawl back, and slacken all his muscles, and stretch himself out to the utmost, "to give his liver breathing-room," as he expressed it.

Piggy Wimpole scarcely felt the heat at all. He was a Cockney, from the Old Kent Road, or somewhere in that neighborhood, and a Cockney can stand anything.

"You great lump!" he advised Farmer cheerfully. "You sits there like a bleeding helephant, an' wipes the pre-spiration off your chivvy like a 'ousemaid swabbin' up the steps. You sweats somethin' awful. I never see a man sweat like what you do. An' you takes as much perishin' interest in what's goin' on as a hegg does, fried both sides. Why don't yer think o' something?"

"What's going on, little man?" asked Farmer, quite good-naturedly. "What is there to think about?"

"Goin' on? Think about? Why, 'eaps. 'Eaps an' 'eaps. There's something doin'

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pretty nearly all the time, if you'd only hopen those great 'yber—'bernatin' heyes o' yours an' look."

"As for instance?"

"Why, take me. Las' night I goes down to the bazaar, an' watches one o' them native weddings. You never see such a sight. Think! Why, man alive, there was enough there to keep a cove thinkin' for a week o' Sundays! D'you suppose, now, there's any love in them native marriages?"

"Love?" said Farmer, dreamily. "Love? Why, sonny, it's love what makes the world go round."

"Love, is it! Well, swap my bob! If you could have seed yourself—when was it?—'bout nine days ago—comin' back from samplin' beer up at the brewery, you'd ha' said it was booze what did it. Lyin' in a byle-gharry, you was, flat on your back, an' yellin' to the gharry-wallah to turn her t'other way round for a change. Fat lot you know about love, you great lumberin' beer-samplin' committee, you!"

"I've got my memories," said Farmer, reminiscently. "I've got my memories, little man. But a man can't think about love in this place, not real love. It'd be a sin to think of it. Look at the married lines! Just take one quick *dekko* at any one soldier's wife you like to name in Oozepore, an' then think o' your own girl, and o' bringing her here—if you can!"

"Are you gettin' sentimental?" The question was incisive, as a man might ask about his friend's symptoms, suspecting snake-bite. "You great, fat 'ay-rick, I believe you are!"

"I gave up being sentimental, little man, on the day that Waverley's wife went out. That was enough for me. Six weeks married, seven weeks out from home, six feet o' sun-baked maidan, thumped out with pick and crowbar, little white tombstone, subscribed for by the reg'ment——"

"Serve 'er right for marryin' a canteen-sergeant!" said Piggy Wimpole, judicially.

"It was pretty bad for him too, little man. Six weeks of it, remember—only six weeks—and her dying by inches all the time."

"Canteen-sergeants 'aven't got no souls," said Piggy.

That was a statement that Farmer did not seem disposed to question. He did not even comment on it. He sat back, with his arms stretched out on either side of him along the wooden bench-back, and stared out through the door beyond Piggy Wimpole. He looked like a man dreaming.

Another man came in, snow-white from head to foot as the other two were, but with a hint of more elasticity inside his uniform. He was but a week back from Poona and the sanitarium, and his liver had not had time to turn on him again.

He looked into the empty beer-jug, sat down beside Wimpole and tossed a half-rupee on the table.

"Have another one," he suggested cheerfully, "and play me in. Mother of me, but this is a thirsty hole! Up at Poona I couldn't drink a quart at one sitting. Didn't want it. Fact! Can't seem to let it alone in this place, though. You chaps haven't finished, have you?"

"No," said Farmer. "We'll join you."

"Trust *'im!*" said Piggy, counting out some coppers. "All right, Temple, I'll come in too, just to stop Farmer there from bustin' 'isself. Watch out, now, an' drink even, or that great lump'll swipe it all. Drinks like a bloomin' helephant, 'e does; dips 'is beak in, an' it's gone! What's the news from Poona? 'Aven't 'ad a chance to chin with you since you got back."

"Oh, nothing much. Only thing I can remember that'll interest you chaps is about Fanny Riley. Remember her? She's going to marry Waverley."

"What? Say that again!"

FARMER WELLS was sitting upright now, and singularly wide awake. His great strong fists were clenched, and lay before him on the table in an attitude that was characteristic of him when aroused. This man would fight when suitable occasion offered, but he never had been known to strike without fair warning, or to use any other weapon than one his antagonist could see. He had no thought of fighting now, but he was evidently stirred to his inmost depths, and his decent instinct made him lay his weapons where any one might see them.

"Say it slowly!" he ordered, as Temple stared back at him astonished.

"Fanny Riley, old Tom Riley's daughter, her what's living with her mother up at Poona, and helping to run the tea-shop on the Linaulie Road—she's going to marry Canteen-Sergeant Waverley, of this reg-'ment."

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He said it slowly, as Farmer had directed, and then raised his beer-glass to repair the damage done by the exertion. He set it down, though, in a hurry.

"When?"

The word was like a military order, and had much the same effect. Temple's lips were dry still when he answered:

"Ten days or so from now."

"And coming down here, to Oozepore, to live with him?"

"Sure as you're alive. Her mother's bringing her."

Farmer's eyes were not what is known as blazing, but there was a hot, hard glint in them that was unaccountably in keeping with the knotted fists.

"She's not!" he answered, half under his breath.

"She is, I tell you. Her mother's bringing her."

"She's not! She's not going to live in this hell, and she's not going to marry *him!*"

"How do *you* know, Mr. Wisehead?"

"Because I'll stop it!"

"You?"

"Yes, me!"

THERE was tense silence for a minute, while Temple and Piggy Wimpole stared hard at Farmer, and he glared straight in front of him, out through the door, past Piggy. Suddenly he raised the gallon beer-jug in one hand, and held it out to Temple.

"Do you want the rest of that?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Because I and Piggy don't!"

Temple took the beer-jug, got up and carried it to the open door.

"Are you quite sure?" he asked, across his shoulder.

"Quite!"

"You, Piggy?"

"No use in crossin' 'im when 'e's in this mood!" answered Piggy. "You 'elp yourself!"

Temple walked ten paces from the doorway, and in full view of the two friends poured all the beer out into the gutter. Then he came in again, took his place and set the empty jug down in between them.

"Now!" he said. "Seems to me we're all three ready! I know you two men are as thick as thieves, and that three's a crowd. All the same, if you want me—and I'd like to stand in—I'm ready!"

Farmer looked hard at him, as though he were trying to read into his secret soul.

"Is it any affair of yours?" he asked.

"No. None. But I like you two chaps, and I don't like Waverley—and—and—I'm game as far as you're game!"

Farmer looked quickly at Piggy Wimpole and Piggy nodded. One of Farmer's fists unclenched itself.

"Pretty decent of you, I think," he said, stretching out his hand.

Temple took it, a little disconcerted by the rather unexpected display of emotion.

"All right," he said, unbuttoning his tunic. "Now, talk. You do the talking."

II

THE traditions of the British Army die harder even than the men who help to make them. The printed orders, and the King's Regulations, and the uniforms may change. They do change, for even Tommy Atkins is allowed to be a human being these days, and the old regulations were most of them inhuman. But the old-time prejudices and the unwritten but war-taught adages remain. So canteen-sergeants have few friends.

They have acquaintances, of course. They know everybody in the regiment to which they happen to belong, and a good proportion of the rank and file of other regiments; and it is considered good policy by the men who ought to know to keep a civil bearing toward them. But they have few if any friends who may be depended on to stand behind them should they get themselves in trouble.

Canteen-Sergeant Roland Waverley was a case in point. He was handsome, of the rather florid type, and well-set-up. He had a clean record. There were no punishments against him. He had no "past" to live down or conceal. But, of all the heat-tried non-commissioned men in Oozepore, he was the loneliest.

Loneliness of that type—when every living soul is just polite to you, and no man cares to take your arm, and call you the son of something quite unprintable, and remain in your company without troubling to talk—grows inward. And then it grows outward again, and your acquaintances, whoever they may be, become aware of it, which makes things worse.

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Waverley had begun his military life by being a good enough fellow in his way—a little too ambitious, a little too one-sided in his point of view, but "not a bad chap." It was his infernal ambition that had ruined him. He was too anxious to make money; too anxious for promotion, for the sake of the extra pay that it would bring. So, as the way of the Army is, he got the promotion and the pay, and lost his friends. He could have had all three, if he had remembered that the friends were most important.

There are many other profitable posts that a man with a good record and ability can win besides that of canteen-sergeant, but Waverley set his mind on what he wanted from the start, and had to bear the consequences.

A committee of officers tested the beer with a hydrometer from time to time, and there was no hydrant down in the cellar where the beer was kept, and a very careful watch was kept on the accounts. But if any one had whispered to the men who drank the beer that no more than six and thirty gallons of it came from each of the regulation casks, they would have considered him a lunatic.

Whether or not Waverley was honest, so far as selling beer went, the mere fact that he retained his post was proof enough that he could not be proved dishonest. But he had to endure the stigma that is the handed-down prerogative of such as he. There was not a joke he made nor a statement nor an effort to be just agreeable that was not twisted, when his back was turned, into an argument against him. And, instead of laughing at it all, and saving up his money, he saved his money and grew mean.

Soon he became what the regiment said he was. And after that he married.

It was one thing for the men who had wives already to bring them along to Oozepore. Tommy Atkins, when he is allowed to marry "on the strength," does so on that understanding. His wife must go with him wherever he is sent, except on active service. But it was quite another thing to go to Oozepore, and then let a young girl come out from home to marry him.

He had his rights, and he took advantage of them. But the regiment gave him no credit for his loneliness, or for anything except his arrant selfishness in not having waited until the turn came for the Nil Desperandums to march to a decent station. And, when his young wife died after seven weeks of India, they dubbed him "Spider Waverley."

That stuck too, for of course he overheard it before long, and guessed at the wherefore of it. He began to lend money out at interest, which is *always* a last stage in the destruction of a soldier's character; and he did many other things that were spiderlike, in keeping with his given character. But the worst came when he went to Poona on a furlough, and lent money to the widow of old Tom Riley.

TOM had one time been a sergeant in the Nil Desperandums, married on the strength. When his time was up, he had taken his discharge in India, as every soldier has a right to do, and had set up for himself as a very small contractor. He died before he had saved as much as ten rupees, and Mrs. Riley had endeavored to eke out her tiny pension by running a little tea-room on the Linaulie Road.

It paid sometimes, as such things often do at the beginning. And then came times when it did not pay, and the Hindu landlord commenced to chalk up compound interest on the unpaid rent. And then came Waverley, swaggering along the street with his heavy black mustache waxed outward fiercely and his chest held pouter-pigeon-wise—a dictatorial, confident, good-looking rooster of a man. Or so he seemed to Widow Riley. And it soon transpired that Waverley had money in the bank, and would do anything in reason—at a reasonable rate of interest—for the widow of a sergeant who had been a friend of his.

So the Hindu landlord received his arrears of rent in full. Later—about a week later—the ownership of the tea-room changed hands, after a deal of acrimonious bargaining between the Hindu and Waverley, and an equal deal of timid acquiescence on Mrs. Riley's part.

There is nothing quite so helpless as a British widow, with a British sergeant's pension, and a daughter to support who happens to be pretty, and the British-Indian law of Civil Debt hanging above her like the sword of Damocles.

But nothing was said as yet about Fanny Riley. Only, the canteen-sergeant ogled her at every opportunity, as any other

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soldier would have done for his honor's sake. And, from time to time, while the bargaining was under way, there were hints thrown out that Waverley was a widower, with the right to marry on the strength again.

And no one in Poona, or no acquaintance at least of Mrs. Riley's, knew that down in Oozepore, where his regiment wilted, the men knew Waverley as "Spider." To her he seemed a gallant soldier, with a good clean record, and a generous heart inside his tunic. And so, too, he seemed to Fanny Riley.

ANOTHER tradition of the British Army crops up here. It is the traditions that have made the Army, in spite of a reverse or two, so they naturally form the warp of any story that treats of soldiers. The daughters of a regiment as a very general rule marry back into the regiment, and become the mothers of more soldiers' wives; and no daughter cares to marry below her father's rank. So, Waverley was at a great advantage from the first, and in more than one way.

Though Fanny Riley, who was over age and quite entitled to make her own selection from among the dozens who laid siege to her, had a previous attachment hidden away in the depths of her unselfish heart, she could no more have been disloyal to her mother than she could have blinked the obvious advantages that Waverley could flaunt. She did not quite like the man, nor quite trust him. But she saw, better than her mother did, what was the position, and she did not shut her ears to her mother's constantly repeated hints.

And when the rent was once more overdue, and Waverley put in once again for furlough, and once more came swaggering along the Linaulie Road—this time with rather more determination in his mien—she listened. Her heart, as has been suggested, was elsewhere, hopelessly elsewhere. But her duty to her mother seemed plain enough, considering the brave fight that her mother had put up for her sake. Then there was the regiment—her father's old regiment—and that means more than something to the daughter of a British sergeant. And there was something else besides—the kind of thing that no man can reckon with, that follows no logical sequence and that makes a woman act as no man would ever act under similar conditions.

"Is there a man named Wells in your regiment still?" she asked Waverley.

"Private Wells?"

"Farmer Wells, they used to call him."

"Yes. B Company."

"Is he a private still?"

"You bet he is! He'll never be anything else. Great beer-swilling loafer, that's all he is."

"He never used to drink hard."

"No? You know him well, then?"

"Oh, no. I knew him once—slightly. But I did know that about him."

She changed the subject then, and when it was referred to later on she denied all interest in it. But she was a woman, with all of a woman's unexpectedness handed down to her by direct descent from Mother Eve, and the fact that Farmer Wells was still in the regiment had some share in forming her decision to say "yes" to Waverley. And, after she had answered "yes," a man named Temple came to Poona on the sick-list, and later bore the news of her engagement back to Oozepore.

III

THE proper celebration of all weddings is yet one more tradition that is woven ineradicably into the fiber of the British Army. They will wish a fellow luck, even if they don't believe he'll have any, and however unpopular he may chance to be, they will give him a roaring send-off for the girl's sake. As long in advance of the event as may be, little committees and secret subcommittees sit about in groups and whisper. There is less beer drunk, because a percentage of the pay must needs be allocated to the cost of celebration; and the wits of every living man are exercised to the utmost to contrive some new, hair-raising scheme that shall outdo all previous efforts and yet not trespass too widely across the borderland of discipline.

So, the fact that Farmer Wells and Piggy Wimpole and Joe Temple sat about a lot, and talked in low voices to one another, and looked mysterious, and walked away when anybody else tried to join in their conversation, excited little if any comment. Waverley, for one, who could not help observing their behavior in canteen, and who must have noticed their constant glances in his direction, deliberately took no notice.

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It was his business, of course, to be surprised when the day came, and to make a little speech declaring on his sacred word of honor that he had never dreamed that any such surprise had been in store for him.

He had no personal misgivings of any kind. He had Mrs. Riley's financial predicament, and Fanny Riley's given word to build upon, together with the Colonel's consent, to make what he wanted possible, and the time-honored traditions of the British Army to make it easy and inexpensive and spectacular.

Once the wedding was over, he had a notion that he could sell that tea-room at a tidy profit, and, after that, the Widow Riley's future prospects did not worry him enough to turn his hair gray.

So he was not worried, either, when he overheard fragments of conversation that would have started him investigating at any other time. There are always a hundred or more wild propositions mooted in advance of every army-wedding, and they generally simmer down to quite reasonable dimensions before the great event. Those that have not done so fizzle into nothing on the day itself, for discipline of the right sort is self-assertive in a crisis.

He saw Farmer Wells whisper, with those two great fists of his clenched on the table in front of him; and he saw that he was far more emphatic and determined than his habit was. He saw Piggy Wimpole curl himself into weird contortions of delight, and he heard what Joe Temple answered.

"Steady, man!" said Temple. "Think twice! That's a court-martial offense, if anybody tumbles to it! I'm not backing down, mind. You're leading this, and you've got the final word. But think before you make your mind up!"

"Hush!" said Farmer Wells. "Not so loud. He's listening. I've made my mind up."

"Let's have a drink," suggested Temple.

"No!" said Farmer. "Not a drop! Booze is all right to help you to forget, but it's no use at all to think on."

" 'Ear 'im?" asked Piggy, nudging Farmer in the ribs, and grinning across at Joe. "This 'ere's the 'oly 'igh priest o' temperance an' chastity what come back from samplin' beer, ten days back, in a bylegharry! S' 'elp me two men and a boy, if 'e wasn't drunker than a 'ole reg'ment o' dhobies! I never see no one 'alf so drunk! Listen to what 'e said to the gharry-wallah!"

"Never mind what he said then," said Temple, who had heard the story already half a dozen times.

It had been too good, and too unprintable to keep. The whole regiment knew it. It had even reached the Mess, and it had been the first story that Temple heard on his return from the sanitarium.

"Let's go somewhere where we can talk this over without anybody hearing us."

SO THE self-appointed committee of three adjourned to the temperance reading-room, which was seldom occupied at that hour of the day, and practically never so shortly after pay-day. They chose three Windsor chairs, drew them up close together by the open window, loosened their tunics and proceeded to conspire.

There was nobody to overhear them. There was nothing through the window but the sight of circling kites and a wandering pariah-dog or so and the baking sun-glare to distract one. If the heat did curl the covers of the year-old magazines, it helped, too, to remind them that they were laying their heads together in a righteous cause.

Oozepore was no place for a white girl of twenty-two, and Waverley no man for her.

"I've finished arguing!" said Farmer. "Court martial or no court martial, I'm going through with it. The Spider's killed one woman, or as good as killed her; and I know Fanny Riley. It'd be not the least use telling tales to her. She'd only set her chin the stiffer. If we knew what's at the bottom of this, I'll bet we'd find that she thinks she's sacrificing herself for her mother's sake. Y'see, I tell you I know her—know her well."

"All right!" said Piggy Wimpole. "Shut up arguin', then! We ain't gharry-wallahs. We don't want to 'ear a lecture on the art o' bein' virtuous! Cut out the sermon, an' get down to general orders."

"Piggy's right," said Temple. "Out with the details."

" 'Course I'm right!" said Piggy. "Let 'im once start preachin' an' 'e'll preach for a bloomin' month! Old Methody-Episcopalian-Salvation-Army-Anabaptist-tub-thumper, that's what 'e is! Let's 'ear the plan!"

"I've told you the plan," said Farmer Wells, "and there are only three of us to put it through. All we've got to do is settle de-

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tails—who's going to do what, and all that sort o' thing. We're in luck, in the first place. He might have decided to get married up at Poona. And, in the second place, we're in luck again because Tom Evers has taken sick and gone into the hospital. There'll be nobody to deputize for Waverley and he'll have to stay on duty in the canteen right up to the last moment, like as not. Then there's the Colonel. If ever you saw a man with a nasty taste in his mouth, that's him."

"'Ow about you, the mornin' after that beer-samplin' committee-meetin'?" asked Piggy. "I'll bet the old man's tongue never tasted that bad. 'E don't drink local beer, for one thing."

"Oh, let that be. I overheard the Colonel talking to the Adjutant about it, and what he said was 'Well, the rules of the service are the rules of the service. The man's got his rights, and I can't interfere; I'm not Providence!' That isn't the way a man talks when he likes a thing, is it?"

"'Im? 'E don't like nothin' what 'e thinks is repre'ensible!" said Piggy. "'E don't even cotton to dog-fights! Wait till 'e's finished with us three after this show's over, an' then see 'ow 'e likes *us!*"

"Are you afraid?" asked Temple.

"Him?" said Farmer, quietly. "He afraid? You're new to this combination, Joe, or you'd know better!"

"My mistake," said Joe.

"Granted," said Piggy. "But Lord love us! Are we goin' to sit 'ere beatin' round the bloomin' bush till the weddin's all over, or what? It's that 'ot, an' I'm that dry, that I won't be able to think in a minute."

"Here's what you do, then," said Farmer. "You've got the most cheek of us three—Joe here's got the way with him and I've got the fists. Besides, it's my funeral in a manner of saying, and the brunt of it's on me. I tackle the bazaar-end of it. Joe, you get round his dibs, and do that part of the business. You won't be able to get leave, being just back from sick-leave, so make the most o' your manner and that tongue you've got. Offer to help him out in the canteen, and jump quick when you get the opportunity. Piggy here meets the train. Is that agreed? Piggy and I put in for three days' furlough, dating from the morning of the wedding."

"Suits me," said Piggy.

"You've got a pretty ticklish job ahead of you, Joe. How d'you feel about it?"

"I'm game."

"All right then. Here he comes now, look, across the parade-ground. Get out, and begin to smooge him right away, 'fore anybody else gets in ahead of you!"

Temple left the reading-room, and met Waverley at the end of the parade-ground. He walked with him away from the canteen, and seemed to have no difficulty whatever in keeping his attention or amusing him. The canteen-sergeant seemed to be in a condescending mood, and Farmer, who was watching through the window, grunted his satisfaction.

"If Joe Temple only works his end of it right," he said, "we're going to pull this off, Piggy!"

"Trust 'im!" said Piggy. "You're what's worryin' me, you great helephant! If you gets preachin' to a gharry-wallah about virtue, there'll be——Hi! Stop that, you great lump! You've got a fist like a——Stop, d'ye hear!"

"You keep that cheek o' yours for the event!" said Farmer. "You'll need it then, my son!"

IV

THE time-table allowed one "mixed" train, once a day, to Oozepore, and that train was scheduled to crawl through the shimmering heat and bring its red-hot, groaning assortment of prehistoric junk-on-wheels to a wheezy standstill at approximately 4 P.M. But even in India, where the Greatest Government on Earth looks after things, time-tables are regarded as an ideal to be lived up to when the many-minded gods of chance permit.

So there was a lookout stationed on the platform, and it was not until he ran at a dog-trot through the dying-down hot-weather wind, and reported the train in sight at the far end of the plain, that the seven hundred and something odd men off-duty started for the railway-station, to line up there and greet the canteen-sergeant's bride.

And just as they started from the barracks, another messenger, a native—colorless clout and turban, and polished-copper skin—ran, too, in the opposite direction. He bore the news of the train's arrival to a mazy quarter of the bazaar, and to a man

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who seemed very interested, for he gave many orders, not one of which had any immediate result. He, too, was a native, and a fat one, a little pompous. He had the ineradicable stamp on him of one who had done much Government contracting, and who knew in consequence that even Sin, where they study it as Art, must be all unraveled and subdivided into measured sections.

He gave his orders as a man who knows that he will be obeyed.

And just as the Nil Desperandums, all unofficered, lined up along the station-platform and took their dressing, another man, a white man this time, who was huge, and who bulked through ill-made civilian clothing like a soldier in disguise, stuffed his tremendous fists into either hip-pocket, and strolled through the bazaar to where a native wedding was in progress. There he stood for a while, and watched the dancers pirouetting before the bridal bullock-cart, that blocked a narrow alleyway.

He did not give the impression of a man who was curious or of one deliberating. He looked like a man who has made his mind up some time since, and who is waiting for his opportunity.

JUST as the train came to a standstill, at the moment when two sergeants and a dozen privates asked "Where's Waverley? Why don't he come?" and Fanny Riley, followed by her mother, and looking very pretty with a bunch of Poona roses tucked into her waist, stepped out to meet a sea of waving helmets, and smiled and blushed in answer to a roar of greeting, just then the big man in civilian clothes stepped up to the bridal bullock-cart, and seized its two oxen by the nose-rings.

The dancers ceased, and stared at him in amazement for a second. The infant bride scurried from the seat backward, behind the curtained part of the affair. The fourteen-year-old bridegroom yelled, and gesticulated. But the big man began to force the oxen backward along the crowded thoroughfare.

In another second there was pandemonium loose. Friends of the bridegroom, and other folk who were merely interested, rushed from every direction to interfere. And they began interfering with a vengeance. Almost more quickly than the eye could follow, the big man was the center of a maelstrom.

Blows were rained at him, and he had to turn and defend himself furiously, to save his skin. And, from nowhere apparently, but with obvious prearrangement, two dozen or more low-caste natives surged out through the opening of a near-by alley, and helped defend him. (You can get any number of men, to do anything you want, in India, at one rupee a head, including the contractor's profit.)

Some one shouted "Fire!" Some dozen others shouted "Loot!"

A yell went up to the effect that Hindu rites were being interfered with. Mohammedans came rushing from a near-by mosque to see the fun, and Hindus poured out of temples and stores and dwellings to stop the outrage. No one knew now what had happened, and everybody had a different version of the news to shout up to the windows as he ran.

In less than ten minutes, every store in the bazaar was shuttered tight, and every occupant was ranged on either of two sides, Hindu or Mohammedan. There were fights proceeding in a dozen different quarters all at once, although neither Hindu nor Mahommedan knew exactly why he fought. They were remembering old grudges, and that sufficed.

And the big man in civilian clothes fought with his fists, striking out at Hindu and Mohammedan alike, and making his way in little spurts, and dogged-does-it bull-like rushes toward a stone building where a little knot of strangely costumed white men and three white women clustered in the doorway. He was bleeding badly before he reached it.

The sergeants' reception-committee on the station-platform had scarcely decided not to wait for Waverley any longer, but to escort Fanny Riley and her mother to the barracks, when bugles in the barrack-square sounded the alarm.

The roar, and the din, and the thunder from the mile-away bazaar explained the reason. There was a second's deliberation, thirty seconds more, while the sergeants fell the men in, and formed them into fours, and out stepped Piggy Wimpole from the station cubby-hole, smiling and good-natured-looking, and innocent as a little child.

"Sounds like the alarm, sergeant!" he

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suggested perkily to the nearest of the non-commissioned officers.

"Does it? You're getting clever, aren't you! Fall in there! Fall in anywhere! Look sharp, now!"

"I'm off duty, sergeant—three days' furlough. How about me looking after the women while you all hurry on?"

"Sergeant-major!" shouted the other. "Here's a man who's off the duty-list—Wimpole. Shall I leave him here to bring the women on?"

The sergeant-major started once quickly, and then nodded.

"Tell him to bring them straight up to the barracks," he commanded.

"Did you hear that?"

"Sure I heard it!"

"Very well, then; lose no time!"

"Right—turn!" roared the sergeant-major. "By the right—quick—march—double!" And the hollow station-building echoed suddenly to the quick-time thunder of fourteen hundred ammunition-boots, as the companies followed one another like a rope uncoiling, and tramped up the road toward the barracks in a dust-encumbered, drum-beat trot.

"What's happening?" asked Fanny Riley.

"Bazaar-riot, by the sound of it," said Piggy, saluting with ultra-punctilious politeness.

"Where is Sergeant Waverley?"

"Lord knows, miss! He was in canteen less than an hour ago, instructing a private how to look after things."

"D'you think he's—d'you think he's—he's in the bazaar?"

"I wouldn't think so, miss," said Piggy, who saw no use in wasting a perfectly good lie when it wasn't necessary. "But we can't stand talking 'ere. You'll 'ave to follow me. There's a gharry waiting for yer, just outside 'ere."

V

THE Colonel of the Nil Desperandums was a wrathful gentleman, by right of birth and breeding and prerogative. He was red behind the neck and, though he was a staunch teetotaller, his nose was colorful and choleric. The regiment was wont to boast that it could tell, by the gradations of purple on his face, just how many men might be in cells, and what the Inspector-General had said in his report.

So, it was not to be wondered at that while he sat his charger on parade, ten yards or so away from all the other officers, and waited for the regiment—or at least the greater part of it—to come at the double from the station, his mood was sulphurous, to describe it mildly.

For one thing, an Indian magistrate, a mild-mannered gentleman in spectacles, had come hurrying to him with a request that he turn out his soldiers, and had dared to hint that it was "Ah—peculiar, sir—peculiar indeed, that they should not be instantly available!"

If the station and the bazaar had not been on opposite sides of the barracks, and if the men had not been obliged to come back for their arms and ammunition, and if, oh, any number of other things!—he would have made his officers run at a double to the men, instead of reversing things. But, as it was, he sat his horse, and fumed, and swore, and waited.

He detested riots. He considered them nearly as degrading as dog-fights, and as demoralizing to the men. And he had an engagement that evening to play whist—"whist, sir! yes, whist! none of your new-fangled abominations for me, sir!"

When the regiment at last arrived, with its rifles at the trail, and panting like a hundred locomotives, the men had no trouble in divining his state of mind. Nor did he lose any time in confirming their impression.

"Beer!" he thundered at them. "Beer! So full of beer, that you can't even double from the station without half collapsing! No time to call the roll now, and no mercy for you! By companies—right-dress!"

And there and then, without giving them time to let the stitches in their sides die down, he led them at the double once again toward the babbling bazaar.

"Are you coming?" he called back to the magistrate. "Come along, sir. I may need you. Ride here, sir, beside me."

So the magistrate, who had hoped against his intuition that he might be left behind, was forced to spur his courage and his pony simultaneously, and to do his educated utmost to look brave.

"It will be the Salvation Army, where the heart of the trouble is," he intimated darkly. "These—ah—foreign religious movements, sir, are most—ah—disturbing elements."

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"Are they?" said the Colonel, who hated all missionaries, because he considered that they lowered the dignity of the white man in the East, but who hated native magistrates with an infinitely greater fervor. "I understand, sir, that you have asked me to turn out my regiment to quell the riot? Very well! From now on, then, until cases are brought up for you to try, the conduct of the matter is in my hands! I'll trouble you to mind your own business, sir!"

VI

MEN see things from a rather jaundiced and exaggerated point of view, when they have been for a year or two in a sweltering pest-hole such as Oozepore. So Farmer Wells considered himself neither more nor less than a diplomatist. He was bleeding, it is true, and doing it profusely. But it was not the first time that he had bled in what he considered a good cause, and he troubled himself very little on that score.

What he had done was what delighted him. At a cost of thirty-five rupees, he had set the whole of Oozepore bazaar at something worse than loggerheads. He had emptied the barracks of all troops, except for a much diminished guard, which had to stay exactly where it had been stationed. And that was what he had been chiefly aiming for. He now had practically the whole of the cantonment empty for himself and his two friends to work in, provided he could only get away from the angry mob that he had enraged so easily.

He reached the Salvation Army "barracks" in the nick of time—just in time to avoid a heavy roof-tile that was aimed at him. The Salvation Army people slammed the door behind him and bolted it, and began to tend his wounds almost before he had time to ejaculate a single word.

He was blowing pretty heavily, for the heat and his recent exercises in the beer-sampling direction had damaged his condition, and the fighting he had come through had not been child's-play by any means.

"Get me out o' this!" he panted. "Never mind the blood! The back way out, quick! Let me out, or they'll tear the place down to get me! Quick, now! Don't argue!"

"What's your name?" asked one of the Salvationists.

"Never mind my name. I'm a 'tec. Bombay police. Down here on a case—tried to arrest my man, and got mobbed. Let me out o' this by the back way—quick!"

The Salvation Army man looked hard at him, for members of that underworld-investigating corps are not necessarily credulous. He was trying to remember; but few men can carry in their heads the mental photographs of each one of a regiment of soldiers, and this one was in mufti, and was smeared with blood.

He gave it up after a moment.

"Any papers?" he asked him.

"They swiped everything I had. Quick! Let me out o' here!"

"They'll only run round behind, and catch you as you come out."

"Not they. I've made my arrangements. Quick, now, for the love o' Moses! D'you want 'em to tear the place down?"

It looked as though the mob was likely to break down the door in any case. But it seemed as though no good could be gained by keeping the mob's quarry there a prisoner. So one of the men led Farmer through the rambling building to the rear, opened a little door for him and wished him luck.

Farmer did not stop to answer. He had laid his plans nicely. There was an ekka waiting for him, and he sprang into it, pushed his fist against the driver's ribs and growled at him from between clenched teeth.

"Jaldee!" he ordered. "Jaldee, you black swab!"

The contractor, too, had done his work well, and had chosen a man who knew how to act promptly.

"Just in time!" said Farmer to himself, as he heard the steady tramp of drilled men beyond the building he had left, and heard the mob howl and scatter away in front of the regiment. "Just in the nick o' time! I must have been scrapping there for half an hour or more! And don't I feel like it, too!"

He knew that there was no possibility of the soldiers leaving the bazaar again before daylight. They would have to wander in sections through the mazy streets and alleys, quelling disturbances with their rifle-butts, and driving the incensed inhabitants back within-doors. So he took his time, now, and made a considerable detour to avoid all possibility of detection.

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HE LEFT the ekka at some distance from the barracks, and gave the man his last rupee. Then he passed the guard at the barrack-entrance without exciting comment. It was growing dark, and by keeping in the middle of the road he contrived to let himself be recognized without betraying the fact that he was still bleeding. The sentry could not help noticeing his dishevelment but, with no officers about, his sense of camaraderie prevented him from asking unnecessary questions.

He shut his eyes, after the time-honored tradition of the army when the opportunity exists, and let Farmer pass unchallenged.

Inside the entrance, fifty paces beyond the guard-house, he was met by Piggy Wimpole, grinning from ear to ear.

"You look a treat for fair!" said Piggy. "'Ere you are. Shove your mug under that 'ydrant. That's better."

He assisted Farmer to remove the more evident traces of the fray, swabbing at his cuts until Farmer cursed him roundly.

"Your end of it 'appen all so-fash?" asked Piggy, ignoring Farmer's expostulations, and thumbing a square inch of skin back into place.

"Not a thing went wrong!" said Farmer. "Not a thing!"

"Good!" said Piggy, chuckling. "Then, there's only one weak point. I've been regaling 'er an' 'er mama on a list o' Spider's lovin' little ways—took 'em both along the road, an' showed 'em the tombstone, too, I did. They ain't feelin' so affectionate by 'alf—not neither of 'em ain't."

"What's the weak point?" asked Farmer, feeling at a tooth, and fingering his bruised face gingerly.

"Never mind your chivvy. You look fine now. The weak point's this. Would a bloke what was just goin' to get spliced within an hour or two spend 'is last minutes o' un'itched 'appiness in waterin' the reg'ment's beer? Now, would 'e?"

"The thing is, does it look that way?"

"It's that circumstantial," said Piggy, "that the Colonel might likely smell a rat!"

"Where's Joe Temple?"

"Down in the bazaar with the rest of 'em. Ran off after 'em, to 'elp prove an alibi. 'E waited for me, though, to let me know everything was all right first. The old man wouldn't wait to call the roll, so nobody knows 'e didn't turn out when the alarm sounded, an' I'll bet 'e's managed to slip in among 'em down there all right."

"Well, go on. How did it happen?"

"Just the same as we arranged. Spider was be'ind the bar, showing Temple the ropes, an' Joe was actin' stupid, same as if 'e didn't understand. The canteen was pretty near empty. Joe'd fixed the beer-engine already, so, when 'e found it wouldn't work 'e says so. Spider tells 'im to go down into the cellar an' stick the pipe into a fresh barrel, an' Joe says 'e don't know 'ow. Spider curses 'im, an' goes down 'isself to do it, an' Joe shuts the trap-door on 'im quick as a knife.

"Meanwhile the men's all down, or on the way down to the station. Joe waits, an' by an' by the riot starts, an' the alarm sounds, an' the men comes doublin' back. While they're paradin', 'e fixes Spider's little rubber tube on to the tap up-stairs, an' pulls out the plug in the floor, an' slips the tube through, an' lets the water run. Then 'e shuts the canteen-door, an' locks it.

"By an' by, when 'e thinks 'e's let enough water run to 'alf flood the cellar— 'e didn't let the tube drop down so low that Spider could ha' reached it—'e goes back again an' turns the water off, an' drops the tube down through the 'ole, an' shoves the plug back. Then 'e locks up for good, keeps the key, tips me the office when I comes up wi' the women in the gharry an' runs to catch up wi' the rest of 'em."

"I don't see any flaws in it," said Farmer.

"There ain't any, exceptin' the one I told you. Now you 'urry up, an' prove your alibi. Your rifle's in the stand by your cot—'urry! Get into uniform as quick as you can move, an' then go 'otfoot down to the bazaar, an' join 'em. It's the Lord's own luck the old man didn't call the roll! You'll be able to claim that you got them bruises in the riotin', an' not tell no lies neither! 'Urry, you great helephant!"

"How's she?" asked Farmer.

"She's all O. K. You leave 'er to me. I'm a reg'lar ladies' man, I am, an' I'm told off reg'lar to look after 'er an' 'er ma. Sergeant-major said so. Go on—'urry!"

So Farmer Wells changed into his uniform, grabbed his rifle and lumbered a little painfully down to the bazaar again. He found no difficulty in slipping in between a section, nor in explaining, when they asked him, that he had been squeezed out of the ranks at a street-corner, and had

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been caught by the mob and hammered.

There were many other men hammered that night, for the lights were out, and the natives were repaying a few old scores. And so, when morning came, and the bulk of the regiment was ordered back to barracks, Farmer had no need of making explanations. He was treated as a sufferer in a righteous cause—as he considered that he was—and sent off to the doctor.

VII

WHEN it rains in India, it pours, and so it is with regiments. They get all their luck in deluges, just as their disasters come hard on the heels of one another. The very next morning came the intimation from headquarters that the Nil Desperandums would depart for Poona in a month, and would give place to a regiment that had grown too healthy in a hill-station.

And, almost as good—though of course not quite so good—was the arrest of the canteen-sergeant, and the consequent canceling of his wedding-arrangements, which had been so luckily postponed. The regiment roared and rocked with glee at the thought that he had been caught at last red-handed.

At the court of inquiry that investigated him there was little need for any one to lie, except of course Spider. There he had been found with the incriminating rubber tube in the cellar with him, and two feet of water on the floor.

What had happened was too obvious to be explained away, though, as the Colonel said, "it seemed a pity that a man should be so utterly dishonest that he couldn't forego watering the beer on the evening of his wedding!"

It was recalled that there has never been a test made with the hydrometer later than midday. He had had the opportunity to water two casks a day, at least. It was ascertained that he owned a freehold up at Poona, and he was unable to explain to anybody's satisfaction how or when or where he had obtained the money with which to purchase it.

It was obvious, of course, that somebody had shut the door on him, but there was no means of proving who had done it. Besides, whoever did do it had performed a signal service for the regiment. He had evidently started the water running, and had peeped down the steps to see whether it was running right, and had been shut in. There were a dozen men who might have performed that office for him, and every one of them, including Joe Temple, denied it. That was all the lying that was done.

Joe swore that he had offered to help Waverley, and had been sent out on an errand. When he came back, he had missed Waverley. When the alarm sounded, he had waited for him as long as he had dared, and had then locked the canteen-door and hurried after the regiment.

His story had a suspicious sound, but he stuck to it; and he stuck to it again at the court martial that tried Waverley, reduced him to the ranks and sentenced him for peculation.

He received only a short sentence, for it was impossible to prove how much he had choused out of the regiment, and none of the men who had paid him twenty-five per cent. per week on week-to-week loans took the trouble to bring charges against him on that account. But when his sentence had expired, he was time-expired as well, so the regiment saw no more of Spider Waverley.

AND Fanny? Farmer Wells screwed up his courage for an interview, and contrived to look about as sheepish when he saw her as a new recruit facing the drill-sergeant for the first time.

"Well, Farmer?" she asked him, for she was a soldier's daughter, and believed that regimental nicknames were much more intimate than so-called christian names—as in truth they are. "Have you anything to say?"

"Why, yes, girl," said Farmer, shifting from one foot to another. "Yes, I have. You've had a look at Oozepore, now. You've smelled it, and you've seen the married lines. That's why! I'm only a private, besides, and there were sergeants by the stack in healthier stations—dozens of them—only waiting for the chance to ask you."

She looked hard at him for nearly a full minute, the muscles of her face relaxing and the corners of her mouth beginning to twitch ominously.

"You fool, Farmer!" she answered him. "Are all men fools like you? I loved you well enough to wait!"

" 'Loved,' did you say?" He was nearer

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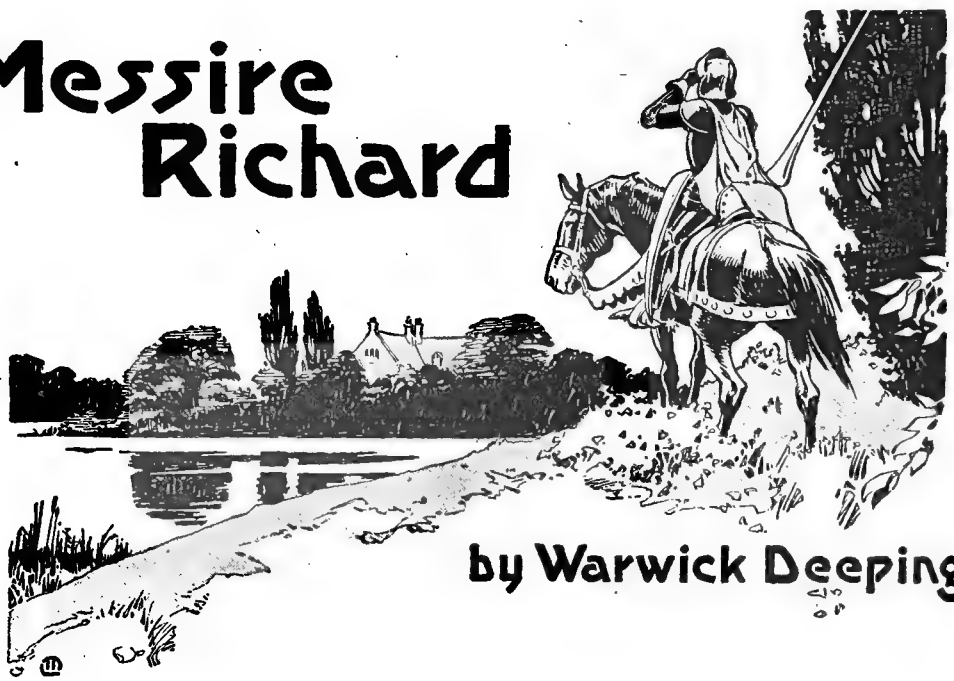
to her now, and his lips were twitching too. "Past, present, or future—which?"

"All three! But—mind! There's some one coming! Farmer! Do leave off!"

He was a sergeant, sure enough, before the time came for him to draw his pension, for he was a good-conduct man, and nobody ever found out what part he played in the breaking of Spider Waverley, unless Fanny found it out, and if she did she held her tongue about it.

But she and the Widow Riley both discovered that there are other things that a regiment will do for its sergeants' widows besides lending them money at interest for tea-rooms that can not pay.

Messire Richard



by Warwick Deeping

RICHARD SKELTON rode armed, for the Black Death was abroad, and the Black Death meant hunger and despair in the forest and the madness of men who had become as wild beasts.

Yet it was Death in a green season, and a man might marvel at the ways of God. The great oaks were budding out into bronze and gold, and the green shimmer of beech-leaves had wiped out the purple Winter gloom. At sunset, birds sang against a yellow sky. Above the brown wreckage of last year's leaves a thousand flowers were blooming.

All through the day, on the forest road Skelton had heard the cuckoo calling, a strange voice in the hush of the woods. Birds sang their Spring-song, and yet Death walked there in the green alleys, and sat beside the brown water of the forest streams. Nor was Death here a noble figure, but a lean, snarling, starved lousel, ready to stab and to rob through sheer hunger.

Skelton had a broken arrow hanging in a fold of his green surcoat. It had been loosed at him that morning from behind a tree, and had snapped against his harness, and Skelton had left it there for luck. He rode with basinet on head, his long spear over his shoulder. The bay horse he rode had its harness of red leather studded with bosses of burnished steel.

"Come now," said he to himself, "may Our Lady confound that rogue of a beggar!

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What was it—right or left by the Three Thorns? Send me to Mount Carmel—but I have forgotten!"

His brown face looked grave and a little grim. The forest was not merciful to strangers, even when a haughty and adventurous spirit looked at life out of shrewd, steel-bright eyes.

"At the stone cross by the Three Thorns on the heath. Yes—to be sure. And I gave the lousel a groat. *'Pax tecum*, lording. A silver groat for a brown pocket.' And then—some one loosed that arrow!"

He frowned a young man's frown, remembering the harsh voice of the strolling vagrant, and the quick, red-eyed glances that the fellow had shot at him. Here was the heath sure enough, rising in rusty purple and green out of the deeper murk of the woods. Great white clouds came out of the south, and northward before him he saw the stone cross and the three wind-blown thorns outlined against the blue of the sky-line. The road forked by the Three Thorns.

MOUNTING the hill he saw a figure in blue seated at the foot of the stone cross. The man sat huddled up as though asleep, his hood, with its scalloped edges and streamers of green and red, drawn forward over his face. Beside him lay a lute, a leather wallet and a stout staff. The sunlight streaming from behind two cloud masses fell full upon the heath, but the three thorn-trees threw three patches of ragged shadow, and one of the shadow-patches covered the man by the cross.

"Hallo there——!"

The man in blue still slept. Skelton could see the black peak of a pointed beard jutting out under the hood. The man's hands were clenched upon his girdle. There was something bleak and stiff in the way his legs lay thrust out from under the blue cloak.

"Wake up, friend! Wake up!"

Skelton swung his spear, and prodded the figure in the ribs. The man did not stir. Skelton's mouth tightened, and his brows came closer together. Catching the edge of the hood on his spear point, he lifted it up and back, and then sat staring at the dead man's face.

It was a parched gray mask, all blue about the mouth and eyes. The nostrils sneered; the lips were drawn back over the teeth.

Skelton crossed himself and backed his horse.

"Poor rogue, half starved, even in running away—and then the Black Death caught him. He'll sing no more romances. He is dead—with Tristan and Iseult."

Skelton sat staring, puzzled in the midst of his pity.

"Ah, my friend, we can not help each other, unless I put up a few prayers. To the right or to the left? Which shall it be?"

He chose the right, and left the dead man sneering at the foot of the cross.

The road tricked Skelton as only a forest road can trick a stranger, luring him some six miles from the Three Thorns, only to branch into three vague and dubious tracks. Wooded hill hung beyond wooded hill, the ashen-gray trunks of the beeches rising from a blue and bronze floor of dead leaves and wild hyacinths. A great hush held, yet Skelton could fancy that he heard a murmur like the murmur heard in a hollow shell.

Sudden and from a great distance came a strange cry, a thin, small sound in the vastness of the forest. Skelton's horse pricked up his ears and shivered. The cry held a moment, and then broke abruptly, as though a hand had been clapped over the wailing mouth. The horse shivered and fidgeted.

Skelton's face looked sharper and more white in the shadows.

He chose the middle path and rode on.

The leafage was young as yet, and the forest clear of underwood. Skelton, glancing from right to left, looked along aisle after aisle of trees, all of them utterly alike; each ending where the black trunks converged and met in the distance. Sunlight glimmered through, tracing a network of shadows on the grass, and giving here and there a mysterious sense of movement. Twice Skelton reined in, ready to swear that he had seen figures flitting from tree to tree. But the vast hush held. He felt to find that his sword was loose in its scabbard, and swung his shield forward on the leather loop that slung it round his neck.

Then, like the breaking of clouds in a wet and windy sky, the forest thinned before him and fell away into a haze of golden light. A gleam of water came up out of the deeps of a narrow valley. Skelton found himself on the edge of the woodland, looking down over a stretch of yellow flowered gorse.

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Below him lay a mere, and in the midst of it an island. He could see the reflected shapes of the white clouds moving over the water, and the flakes of blue sky in between, while under the banks the water lay black as jet. The island itself might have been a May-day garland afloat upon the water. It was a mass of fruit-blossom, rose and white, piled upon the branches of a hundred trees.

Skelton shaded his eyes with his hand. The gable-end of a house, dark and shaggy with thatch, discovered itself in the thick of the island-orchard. Moreover he saw a wooden landing-stage, with a barge moored there, where kingcups studded the banks with gold and flags thrust their green swords up out of the water, and clear water slept in golden shallows.

"Hum," said he. "No smoke is rising. Has Death been there? And that cry I heard?"

Skelton's horse threw up his head and shivered.

"Sancta Maria—Sancta Maria!"

Skelton was well-nigh as startled as his horse. The shrill wild voice rose from the secret orchard yonder, carrying the two hundred paces between the island and the forest's edge. The words were so distinct that Skelton thought of witchery or magic.

"A new cry, and the voice of a girl! By the King's honor—am I afraid? And of what?"

The horse still shivered, and Skelton scanned this secret hollow hidden away in the thick of the forest. A dogged and adventurous look came into his eyes.

He spoke to the horse.

"Gaillard, let us see what we can find yonder"

He rode down to the water's edge, noticing the double ropes that ran from a post on the bank to the barge on the farther side. A wooden palisade came into view, and beyond it the roof shingles and louvre of a hall.

Skelton dismounted, looped Gaillard's bridle over his spear and thrust the truncheon into the ground. The ferry-ropes ran through a pulley-block, and by drawing on one of them Skelton found that he could bring the barge across. It came sliding toward the bank, ripples running from its blunt black prow. Climbing in, he kept the wet rope moving, and so ferried over to the island.

II

SKELTON stood listening, glancing right and left into the alleys of the orchard. The island and the house half hidden by fruit-blossom were so silent that Skelton felt a certain eeriness stealing toward him like a shadow. Ahead of him rose the palisade, an open gate showing the paving-stones of a courtyard.

He passed through and swerved swiftly to one side from a huge hound that lay crouching within the gate, its muzzle between its paws. Skelton's sword came out against the dog's spring. But nothing happened. The beast did not stir. Like the man under the cross by the Three Thorns —it was dead.

Skelton's eyes fell into a hard stare. He turned slowly on one heel, scanning the courtyard and the silent house like a man who is fearful of being taken unawares. Straight before him yawned a timber porch, the thatch coming down within three feet of the ground, the hollow within dark as the hollow of a cave. Skelton crossed the court, and had one foot inside the porch before he stiffened and recoiled against one of the massive corner-posts.

In a recessed seat sat the figure of an old man, an old man with a white beard and a clay-colored face. The filmy eyes stared into nothingness. One lean hand held a crust of bread.

Skelton drew his breath sharply, and his face looked pinched.

"Mother of Heaven! Is the whole world dead!"

A blank horror of the place seized him and sent him swinging back across the court with a clatter of steel. The Black Death had been here, and pestilence might be in his nostrils. His eyes fell on the dead hound by the gate. Did dogs die of the Black Death, or was there more than he imagined?

He turned with a set face, and frowning, walked back toward the house.

"Richard Skelton, my friend, you are very like a coward. You shall see the end of this before you cry '*Nunc dimittis!*' "

The door leading from the porch into the hall stood ajar. Skelton could see nothing but the end of a wall hung with green arras and the carved oak panels of a screen. Recklessness seized him, an impetuous desire to see all that this house contained. Sword on shoulder he pushed across the

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threshold, turned and stood staring up the hall.

In a great chair on the daïs sat a girl clad in a gown of green sarsenet broidered with crimson thread. Her hands hung limply over the lion-headed arms of the chair. Her eyes were two dark circles; her mouth open as though to utter a cry. Purple-black hair fell over her shoulders and about a face that was white as milk. Behind the chair, rich arras made a cloud of red and gold.

For the moment Skelton thought that the girl too was dead, so white, stiff, still was she. Then one hand raised itself and gripped the arm of the chair. She leaned forward, with chin lifted, her eyes the eyes of one who dazedly accepts some prophetic doom.

"You have come. I have waited——"

She spoke in the French tongue, and like no Englishwoman, her voice a mere whisper.

Skelton stared.

"Assuredly, madame, I am here."

"The naked sword. Hasten. Waste no pity. Let it be done quickly."

A dozen thoughts hastened together through Skelton's mind.

"By my honor, she is but a child! Is it madness, or some terror greatly to be feared? What manner of man am I held to be, and this sword too? Those eyes of hers stare one into stammering."

He went forward three steps and, dropping the point of his sword to the floor, looked at her compassionately with his shrewd gray eyes.

"Madame, if it was God's wisdom that brought me here, I come as a friend."

Her white face strained toward him.

"Sir, do not jest with me. You are my lord's messenger——"

"I am no man's messenger."

"But you come—to make an end?"

She tottered, put a hand to her throat, then sank sideways over the arm of the chair. Her hair fell down over her face leaving her white neck showing.

Skelton put his sword back into its scabbard, gave one glance over his shoulder and made toward the daïs.

"A man feels a knife at his back in such a place. Some devil's work a-brewing! What's to be done? Maybe she is dead with fear."

He bent over her, touched the black hair and the white neck, and a sudden awe came over him. This helpless thing lying like a wounded bird! Skelton's eyes softened. He lifted her and carried her out into the courtyard, passing the dead man, who still stared into nothingness.

"Tsst! That and the silence of the place would be enough to kill! Blue sky and the sunlight on apple-blossoms are kinder."

HE FOUND a gate leading from the courtyard into the orchard, and laid the girl on the grass under a tree. Her head fell back, showing the white throat; and some of her hair clung to the joints of his arm-braces. The pale mouth, partly open, might have uttered a cry of pain.

Skelton ran back to the hall, found a silver-mounted maple cup on the daïs table and, filling it with water from a pitcher, returned to the orchard. He knelt, and sprinkled some of the water on her throat and face.

She opened sudden eyes on him, great brown eyes full of a swimming fear.

"Sir, is it ended?"

She felt her bosom, and then looked at her hands as though expecting to see blood. Pity, and something more than pity, seized Skelton and possessed him.

"Come, sister, why look at me with eyes of terror? Drink. Here is water."

She had started up, and sat leaning against the trunk of the tree. Skelton held out the cup, but she put out a hand with the gesture of one warding a blow.

"No—not that. It is poisoned!"

"I took it but a moment ago from the pitcher in the hall."

"It is poisoned. Rather would I feel the sword—in my heart."

He looked at her with compassion.

"Madame, I tell you that you speak in riddles. Some great fear is upon you. Take courage. Is a Skelton of Skelton's a man likely to bring you death?"

His man's pride sounded a new note. Shading her eyes with her hand, she bent toward him and looked intently into his face.

"You do not look like one who has been sent to kill."

He laughed, with a touch of grimness.

"We Skeltons are not cutthroats."

Yet, seeing that her eyes were still troubled and questioning, he drew his sword and, holding the crossed hilt before him, kissed it and made an oath.

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"By the blessed blood of the Lord Jesus, I, Richard Skelton, ride as a stranger through the forest, being bound for the sea where I take ship for France. This I swear."

Her eyes filled with misty light.

"France!" She murmured the word. "St. Gilles and the Norman apple-orchards!"

For some moments she dreamed, and then, waking, stretched out her hands with a sharp cry.

"Sir, is it the truth?"

"Have I not sworn it, I, Richard Skelton?"

She looked long into his eyes, and then let them fall under the downward shadow of their black lashes.

"I am called Nicolette," she said.

"Then, Nicolette, trust me. Speak—and let me serve."

She gave him one quick upward glance of the brown eyes.

"I am hungry. I have tasted no food for three days."

He was on his feet.

"I have food and wine in my saddle-bag."

"Wait, let me tell everything. For three nights I have sat and watched. Messire Richard, have pity. I am the Lord of Mount Badon's lady. He brought me out of France, out of the great war. But then he tired, for he is quick, and passionate, and very fierce. I was but a child. And it befell that a perilous secret that was his came to my ears. He would have killed me then, but I pleaded. And then came that other woman with the head of gold, and the red, sneering mouth.

"I can not tell you all, save that I knew that my lord desired my death. A month ago he sent me in a closed litter to this place. There were three good servants—that was his cunning—and they were true to me. First, Bertrand went to the woods to hunt, and came not back again. Geoffrey crossed to seek him and he too came not back again. Then—then—three evenings ago a man came. Old Stephen ferried him across. That night old Stephen and the dog died, and in the morning the man had gone.

"But I—I was very fearful. I had a vision of things. I knew that Death was watching, watching like a wolf in the dark. I could see the yellow eyes. I was alone. I touched neither food nor drink, and sometimes I cried aloud with fear. Nor had I courage in me to fly into the forest. Death is there. For three days I have had a voice near me; it speaks and I listen. 'Death comes,' it says, 'if not with poison, then with the sword.' Do not laugh. It is true. I know that my lord desires my death."

SHE lay back, panting, her hands over her bosom. Skelton was walking to and fro, clean, lithe, hawk-faced fighter that he was, trained from his youth to arms and to the governing of his manhood. This Norman girl Nicolette had spoken the truth. It had gushed out on his feet like water from a spring. Her white face and fear-weary eyes stirred a great wrath in him, wrath that was quickened by compassion.

"Nicolette," he said suddenly, coming to stand before her, "this is a knot for a man's fingers to unravel."

Her eyes waited on his.

"I, Richard Skelton, bind myself to meddle in this matter. Maybe it is in your heart to see the orchards of Normandy again?"

He saw before him the face of an eager, incredulous child.

"The orchards, and the white roads, and the green fields of St. Gilles! Messire, do not mock me."

"Before God, should I mock you in this?"

"Messire Richard——"

"Courage. I am here to serve."

He glanced at the western sky. The sun was hanging low above the tree-tops, and long shadows lay upon the orchard-grass. In an hour twilight would fall, and the forest at night was no place for a man who knew not the ways.

"Nicolette," he said, "you shall rest here to-night, and I will stand on guard. But first you must eat. I left my horse over the water, and there is food for three days in the saddle-bag. I will go and bring him over."

He left her there, and forced upon himself a task that was done for pity and not for joy. Taking the body of the old man from the porch he laid it in an outhouse and, dragging the hound to the same place, he left it beside the body of the man. Skelton's face looked older. It was a grim business, gone through with set teeth and frowning eyes.

"Pah, the dead can witness. What does this child know of such things? The Sheriff

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must come here and hold his nostrils. France—surely. But first a word for honor and dishonor."

He brought his horse across, turned him into the empty stable and went back to lash the barge to the landing-stage.

"If any cutthroat would come at us to-night, let him swim for it. As for the Lord of Mount Badon, I will haul him by the heels to the ordeal of the sword. Now for the child's hunger."

Before they supped together under the apple-tree, Skelton put off his body-armor and knelt for Nicolette to unfasten the laces of his helmet. He set red wine and white bread and venison before her on the grass, smiling at the shyness with which she sought to dissemble her hunger, and watching the color steal back into her lips, and the fear melt out of her eyes.

His own close-cropped, sun-browned head stood out like the head on a medallion, with the green and shadowy spaces between the trees for a background.

The shy, gliding uplift of her eyes toward him made him forget that he had been on the road all day. Mostly she looked down into her own lap, the long black lashes making two curves of shadow. There was just a gleam of soft light now and again like sunlight on coy water. The red mouth displayed provoking curves. The silences between them lured them to watch and wonder.

A blackbird burst into song on one of the trees. A musing tenderness crept into Nicolette's eyes. She began to hum a Norman song, swinging one white hand to and fro, with the forefinger pointed. Skelton watched her, and the hush of the forest was the listening heart of a lover.

Her soul dropped back to earth when the blackbird ceased singing. She met Skelton's eyes, and went red to the lips.

"Ah, Messire, I say my prayers when I sing. As for you—I shall always remember you in my prayers."

He held the cup toward her and then drank.

"My troth to you, Nicolette."

Dusk came, and with it a heavy dew. The fruit-trees stood black against a saffron sky, and there were strange gleams of gold upon the darkening water of the mere. Skelton fastened on his body-armor, while the girl stood holding his basinet. Her white face dropped toward him as he knelt for her to helm him.

"I crown you with my gratitude, Messire Richard!"

Skelton felt the dusk like a sweet vapor about him, heavy with the scent of apple-blossoms.

He went to feed and water his horse, while Nicolette brought torches into the hall, lit them and set them in the brackets. She saw that the dead man had gone from the porch, and blessed Skelton in her heart.

NIGHT fell. Skelton sought to persuade her to go into the upper room and sleep.

"I can keep guard here," he said.

But she would not be persuaded.

"I could not sleep. And after all the horror of loneliness it is good to look into the face of a friend."

"Then let us tarry here, and talk. If you should fall asleep in your chair, Nicolette, I shall watch over you. And I shall wake you at dawn."

Her eyes questioned his.

"Tell me all that is in your thoughts."

He began to tell her of his journey to France, why he went thither and whence he came. Very gently he brought the morrow before her, with its needs, perils and importunities. Her face showed a vague unrest, but her eyes met his without fear.

"Messire Richard, I trust you—for who else is there for me to trust? I will do all that you desire, though to tell the tale before strangers, to have it tossed abroad——!"

"Nicolette, let not that shame you. The shame shall lie elsewhere. Tell me the truth. This false lord of yours—your heart will not weaken out of pity?"

He saw her face stiffen.

"He is horrible to me. Ah—if you knew!"

She did not catch the gleam in Skelton's eyes.

"Then let God judge him," he said.

The night was wonderfully still. No wind stirred to rattle the lattices or blow the bloom from the orchard-trees. The torches burned steadily in the brackets. The vast hush of the forest shut the place in as with a great black cliff.

Suddenly Nicolette started in her chair. She sat rigid, listening, her eyes on Skelton's face.

He saw her lips move.

"Listen!"

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A FAINT sound came out of the night, a splashing sound as though some one were swimming the mere. Skelton had laid his sword and shield on the table. He drew them toward him.

Nicolette's hand pointed.

"The door——!"

It stood half open, with the oak bar leaning against the wall.

"Quick. Let us bar the door!"

"Let the door bide as it is. Take courage, Nicolette. Listen!"

The splashing had ceased, and out of the stillness of the night came the sound of rapid and heavy breathing. The pupils of Nicolette's eyes dilated and her lips moved as though she were praying. Skelton put himself between her and the door.

Soft paddling footsteps crossed the courtyard. The two in the hall waited, wondering what the torchlight would reveal. Skelton's eyes were set steadily toward the door. He drew his breath through twitching nostrils.

"Ah!"

Then they saw the thing that had padded across the courtyard; a huge, tawny-colored mastiff with a spiked collar about his throat. Water was dripping from the beast's body, and his eyes shone blood-red in the torchlight.

The dog turned, blinded, and then shot forward like a stone from a mangonel. It uttered no sound, but leaped at Skelton, and took the sword's point in its throat.

Skelton slew the dog as it struggled to rise. Nicolette had covered her face with her hands. She remained, cowering, till she heard the sound of Skelton's voice.

"God be thanked that I missed the right road to-day!" he said. "There are those who sent the dog to be reckoned with, across the water."

He glanced at the torches, kindled two fresh ones and thrust them into the brackets before he went to the door and peered through the gap by the hinges. A full moon had just topped the forest, and its light lit the whole courtyard save where the palisade threw a deep black shadow.

Skelton held his breath and listened. A faint, creaking sound came to his ears, and the swish of a rope striking the water.

"Some one has swum across and unfastened the barge!"

A black figure darted into the moonlit courtyard, stood motionless a moment and then began to steal toward the porch. Skelton saw that it came alone. He drew back behind the half-closed door, standing close to the wall.

Footsteps shuffled at the porch. He could hear the man breathing, close to the door-hinges. An eye would be peeping there, Skelton guessed that much, but he knew that whoever spied there could not see the figure in armor set like a pillar against the wall. Skelton's sword-arm stiffened. He never moved his eyes from the edge of the door.

The door moved very slightly. Then something red appeared at the edge thereof, the fringe of a man's hair. A face followed it, a long, lean, crooked-nosed face straining forward at the end of a leathery neck. Then eyes looked toward Nicolette seated in the chair on the daïs. They were narrow eyes, set close together under oblique eyebrows.

Then Skelton struck. He had a moment's glimpse of the narrow eyes darting round at him, and dilating with fear. The sword fell before the man could dodge. He sprawled face-downward, shooting out his hands at the ends of the green sleeves of a close-fitting jupon.

Skelton wasted no pity and, dragging the body inside the hall, left it behind the door. Then he put an eye to the hinge-crack and waited. He could hear the plash of ripples against the landing-stage, and the noise of the ferry-rope running through the pulley-block. The prow of the barge ground against the stage.

Skelton stood ready to close and bar the door should the odds promise to be too heavy. He watched the gateway in the palisade. A solitary figure came into view and, by the way the moonlight glinted upon it, Skelton knew that the man came armed. A silver streak betrayed the naked sword that he carried upon his shoulder.

THE figure remained poised for an instant between the black barriers of the palisade. Presently it moved forward into the courtyard, turning its head this way and that, and showing a snout-vizored basinet that gave it the look of some grotesque beast. No other figure followed it, and Skelton's grim mouth twitched out a smile.

He turned, strode up the hall and took his shield from the table. Nicolette's dark eyes gazed at him in mute appeal.

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"Bide there," he said to her in a low voice, "and leave us room to quarrel."

He dropped the point of his sword to the floor, and rested his hands on the pommel.

They heard footsteps enter the porch. The door was thrust open, and a knight in polished harness, with a red surcoat turned up over his sword-belt, stood in the dark entry. Behind the black holes in the snout-like vizor were eyes, but they were invisible to Richard Skelton nd Nicolette.

For fully half a minute the figure remained motionless in the torchlight, as though the man within the steel shell were astonished at what he saw. The red-haired servant in the green jupon lay dead behind the door, the mastiff under the table. Nicolette, with chin tilted, stared wide-eyed down the hall. Skelton, grim and inscrutable, stood beside her, leaning on his sword.

The man in the red surcoat moved at last. He advanced up the hall and, raising his sword, pointed toward the door.

Skelton threw up his head and laughed.

"God's mercy, sir! If I stand in your way, the saints be thanked for it!"

"Out—out——!"

"The dog and the servant go before their lord."

A sob of wrath came from the closed helmet. He of the red surcoat rushed suddenly upon Skelton, heaving up his sword. Skelton sprang forward,to smother the blow. The two steel-clad bodies met with a crash.

Skelton's sinews proved the stiffer, and the man in red went back. He brought up with a jerk against the heavy table, and saved himself, only to find Skelton's sword rattling about his head. The blade glided off the basinet to the left shoulder, cut the linked mail between the shoulder-plates and drew blood.

The red knight was a big man and no lap-dog. He dropped his shield and, putting both hands to his sword, he fell upon Skelton like a laborer flailing corn. The blows came with a savage clatter, but they were rash, tempestuous blows that a cool fighter could put aside. Skelton gave back, guarding himself and watching his man.

Then the red knight showed his color. He swerved aside, and made a rush toward the daïs where Nicolette sat, very white and still. The great sword flew up. Her brown eyes watched it as though bewitched.

Skelton shouted to her, as he leaped after the man in red.

"Down, down—throw yourself down."

His cry broke the spell. She threw herself forward under the very blade of the sweeping sword. The sword struck the back of the oak chair, and jammed in the tough wood.

The red knight wrenched it free, but Skelton was on him with eyes of fire. His wrath whistled with the sweep of his sword. A blow on the gorget wrenched the plates apart. A second blow went home even more grimly. The red knight blundered back, and struck the wall close to one of the torch-brackets.

He recovered himself, snatched the torch and rushed blindly at Skelton, trying to thrust the flames into Skelton's face. Skelton struck the arm down and, making a point of his sword, aimed for the broken gorget. The point went home. For a moment the red knight hung like a doll on a wire, then fell backward, with an up-jerking of the arms.

Skelton trod out the torch, and stood over him, but the red knight did not move. A red stream poured out over the broken plates of the gorget.

Nicolette had risen, her black hair clouding about her eyes. Skelton glanced at her and, bending over the fallen man, cut the helmet-laces with his dagger. The steel shell fell away, showing the turgid, fleshy face of a man of strong passions and coarse desires.

Skelton heard Nicolette utter a strange cry. She was at his elbow, staring at the dead man.

"It is he!"

She gripped Skelton's sword-arm with her two hands, and looked down at the face of the man—her husband—who had plotted to bring her death.

III

THE sun was still tangled among the tree-tops when Richard Skelton and Nicolette took leave of the secret orchard. The light of the dawn streamed over the forest, slashing the dark water of the mere with swords of gold. A thin white mist still shimmered about the island, and the fruit-trees looked dim and gray.

Utter weariness had given Nicolette sleep, but a horror of the place lived in her eyes

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as she looked back across the water. Death and dishonor remained there, and she dreaded the hard eyes of the world.

Skelton had crossed before there was sufficient light to discover whether the Lord of Mount Badon had left men hidden in the woods. He had found two horses tethered to a tree, and had unfastened the beasts and turned them loose into the forest. Now he was cutting the ferry-rope and sending the barge adrift on the water.

He came and saw Nicolette's frightened eyes.

"Look not back at life!" he said. "Come, little sister—courage."

She held out her hands to him.

"Ah, Messire Richard, if there were no men to ask questions, to gape at me and say, 'Why this? Why that?' My heart is weak in me. I can not bear it."

Skelton took her hands.

"Nicolette," he said, "would you be at the mercy of that yellow-headed woman's tongue? No, by my honor, you must suffer this, for my sake, child, as well as for your own. The truth must be told."

She looked at him and burst into tears.

"Do with me as you desire. I have none to trust but you."

Gaillard carried them both that morning, and the good saints were kind to them in the forest. At the Three Thorns, where the dead man still sat at the foot of the cross, they fell in with a forester who knew all the ways.

"Good friend, is Sir Thomas of Broomhanger still Sheriff?"

"He is, lording, and may Mother Mary give him a long life."

"Show me the road to Broomhanger."

"Follow your left hand, lording, and two leagues will take you there."

Sir Thomas and Richard Skelton had fought together in the French wars, and the Sheriff was a shrewd man, and straight as a sword.

"Tarry here three days," he said, "and we will have the truth stored in the noddles of our inquest-men. They will be brisk for love of me. Geoffrey of Mount Badon! Pah! A bullying, profligate devil! And that black-eyed child too. Had the man no pity?"

They looked at Nicolette eating sweetmeats in the window seat, with Dame Isabelle to comfort her.

"Spare the child, where you can, old comrade."

"Trust me, Dick. In a week you shall be in France."

Thomas of Broomhanger was as good as his word.

THE fruit-blossoms had fallen in the orchards of St. Gilles when Nicolette walked once more in her father's garden and saw the white pigeons crowding the red roof of the great dove-cot. Aspens shivered against a sky of blue, and the broad meadows about the château were covered with cloth of gold.

A month had passed, and Nicolette had the look of one who waited. She sat often at a turret window, gazing along the white road that ran between the aspen-trees.

"He will come again," she said to herself, "yes, he will come."

A wet sunset in June brought Richard Skelton to St. Gilles. Faces peeped out of the château windows at him; good folk had conspired.

"If Messire Skelton would walk in the garden, the Sieur de St. Gilles may be found there——"

Skelton went, and found Nicolette walking amid the rose-bushes and the beds of lavender and thyme. The sky had broken in the west, and the wet world smoked like a sweet sacrifice.

Her startled face caught the sunset-glow.

"Messire Richard!"

"Nicolette, I have ridden seven leagues to-day."

"Through the rain——!"

"And I am discontented—angry with this fair place. For I fear no man could carry you away from St. Gilles."

She looked at him with shy brown eyes that glimmered.

"Some men are so strong," she said.

"So strong?"

"That it is useless for a woman to say them nay!"

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The Brass Idol

by Gordon McCreagh

THE Rajah of Kalapani rose from his seat.

"Give the gentlemen my salaam," he ordered, and stood nervously rubbing his hands, while a fat smile spread over his countenance, in readiness to receive his visitors.

The Rajah by no means conformed to the popular idea of an Oriental potentate. He wore no brilliant-hued garments thick with gold embroidery and incrusted with jewels. On the contrary, he affected European clothes, and the only jewelry he displayed was an overload of diamonds on his pudgy fingers, noticeable rather for their showy size than for their purity and luster.

The door swung open, and a tawdry retainer entered backward, salaaming to the ground.

"The heaven-born will condescend to enter?"

The Rajah came forward effusively. No sonorous phrases of punctilious welcome rolled from his lips. This was an "enlightened" Rajah. He had been educated at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta, and spoke a fluent chee-chee, which is the language of the Indian-born white man.

"Gentlemen, I am veree pleased to perceive you, especial' pleased. You will take a seat? You will have a drink, yes?"

Experience had taught him that this was the first ceremony to be observed in dealing with white men.

"No thank you, Rajah sahib; not so early in the day," said the shorter of the two men, and "Same here," chimed in the other.

"Ah, I momentarily forgot that you did not imbibe according to custom. So much the better. We can now proceed to the business. This is a matter, gentlemen, of much secrecy, requiring also circumspection and valor."

"I know, Rajah sahib," said the broad-built man wearily. "It's the usual thing, I suppose; when you can't get any one else who's fool enough, you send for us."

"You always discuss matters in such

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unpleasant nakedness, Mr. O'Shane," protested the Rajah. "But it is nevertheless truth. This is an affair demanding secrecy, and knowing you, and Mr. Dickinson also, to be gentlemen of integrity and honor——"

"Huh!" broke in Dickinson. "That means you want us to do something particular low-down-mean."

The Rajah squirmed and smiled weakly. He hated this unequivocal directness. His Oriental mind liked to approach a matter by circuitous routes, with many compliments and vague hints before coming to the point. But these men had dealt with him before, and understood the tortuous windings of his intellect thoroughly. He gave up, with a despairing motion of the hands and, rising, crept stealthily to each door, listening.

Then, apparently satisfied, he unlocked a cabinet and took from it a package wrapped in dirty cloth. After listening at the doors once more, he returned to his seat and unwound several feet of unclean wrapping, finally placing on the table before his guests a swag-bellied little idol of brass about four inches high.

"This is veree holy thing, gentlemen," he commenced.

O'Shane took it up and examined it, then he grunted contemptuously.

"Holy be hanged. It's a fake! Artificially stained to look old."

The Rajah wriggled on his seat again and his hands shot forward in desperation.

"Mr. O'Shane, you are too much clever," he complained. "Rightly are you named Snake. Therefore will I tell the truth, with all brevity. This is counterpart, accurate copy. Original is now in possession of a man living in mountain fastnesses of Sikhim, beyond Santakpho, and I have sent for you to obtain it for me secretly."

O'Shane turned to his partner.

"You hear that, Dick? He wants us to go and swipe the thing for him."

"He can go straight to ——!" came the uncompromising answer.

The Rajah held up his hands in eager protestation.

"Gentlemen, my friends, you are under misapprehension. I would not ask you to do such thing!" He was interrupted by a scornful grunt from Dickinson. "I am telling the true story, as a Brahmin, gentlemen!" He laid his palm across his forehead in solemn affirmation. "The thing is property of the temple, and it was stolen by a man committing worst sacrilege. The anger of the God pursued him and brought him to doom, but on his death-bed he made it over to present owner, who, however, is not aware of real value."

"Hm! Sounds very theatrical," commented O'Shane. "Why don't you buy it from him, then?"

"He is fanatic and will not sell. I will confess that I have once attempted force, with unsuccessful disaster, and the man has now in some measure acquired reputation as a holy man, and none of my people will approach him. Therefore I appeal to you gentlemen, and for this service I will pay three thousand rupees cash. This is large amount for so small labor," he concluded.

"And that means," added Dickinson, "that there's some darn big risk tied up with it what you ain't told us."

O'Shane nodded agreement.

"That's right," he said; "but go ahead, Rajah sahib. What's the copy for?"

The Rajah grinned cunningly.

"That is for, when you have taken original, to replace with this, in order that the man may not know until at least I have regained my own dominions. You see, I will follow you as far as Kurseong and there wait for your return."

"An' that," interrupted Dickinson again, "means that you're dead scared of the holy man yourself for one thing, an' for another that if we bring it to your own nest of robbers, some one else will likely grab the loot."

The Rajah acquiesced with another weak smile.

"That is possibility, gentlemen, and you see, being Brahmin, and spiritual head of temple, I am naturally desirous of returning the god myself. Three thousand rupees, gentlemen, and I will further provide horses and guide," he added persuasively.

O'Shane thought for a while, looking reflectively into space.

"Well," he announced at length, "we don't want your horses. We can travel quicker on foot in the mountains, though we can use the guide. But there's something back of all this, and the money isn't enough. We'll take a chance for five thousand."

The Rajah protested vigorously, whining that his domains were small and that his revenues were by no means large.

"I know all about your revenues, Rajah sahib," laughed O'Shane. "Only a couple

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of hundred villages; but what about that opium-factory hidden away in the cellars of your palace—with opium at eighty rupees a pound?"

The Rajah's face went yellow with sudden fear, and he collapsed in his seat.

"Bub-but," he stammered, "that is —— falsehood, Mr. O'Shane. When did you hear such wicked story? If the Government of India should hear such base slander—— *Aré baprêl* I have always been a friend to you, Mr. O'Shane, haven't I?"

He was altogether a pitiable sight.

O'Shane laughed again.

"That's all right, Rajah sahib. I'm no Government agent, and I'm not going to give your little gold-mine away. But you see I know that you can well afford to pay five thousand for your job."

The Rajah recovered slowly from his shock, all the while volubly protesting his innocence of any illicit dealings in the Government monopoly, and at the same time beseeching his "veree dear friend" never to mention such a pernicious rumor to anybody outside. Finally he agreed to the enhanced price with a truly Oriental readiness to pay what he obviously considered hush-money.

The matter being satisfactorily settled, the Rajah was all smiles again.

"Veree good, gentlemen," he concluded. "That is all right then. You will now take a drink? No? Veree good. I will now give final instructions. This man lives in territory of Urjun Kazi. Now the Kazi is well known to both of you, and my plan is that you go to Kurseong and send him a gift asking leave to hunt game in his country—the gift I will also supply, in place of horses which you refuse. At Kurseong my guide will come to you with a token from me. This is satisfactory? Veree well then, that is all. *Khoda hafiz*—good-by; or I should say rather *Au revoir*."

AT KURSEONG a telegram from the Rajah was waiting for the two partners, enjoining them on no account to set out with anybody but his accredited guide. O'Shane handed it across the table.

"What do you think of it, Dick?" he asked.

"Don't like it one little bit, Snake. It smells kinder suspicious. Why's he so blamed anxious for us to take his man along? If this bug has gotten up a reputation as a wonder-worker, anybody we meet'll be able to direct us right to his front door."

"That's what I think," agreed O'Shane. "I've got a darned good mind to go without him, except that we could make him do the cooking, and it may be that the old thief, just like a native, is suspicious of everybody, and wants this bloke to keep tab on us for fear we should keep the thing when we get it."

When the guide eventually arrived, bringing a letter with the royal seal stating that he was Ram Dass and that the Rajah placed implicit reliance in him, his appearance was by no means calculated to inspire confidence. He was a long, lean mountaineer from the Western Himalayas with a fiercely upturned beard and a saturnine cast of countenance enhanced by an abnormal development of his left canine, which projected over his lower lip like a great yellow fang. However, he showed himself to be very humble, and constituted himself the white men's servant, relieving them of so much trouble over minor details that they were forced to admit his appearance belied him.

In their long journey into the mountains, when their calves ached from the stiff ascent and their toes were jammed in a blistering pulp against their boot-caps on the steep down-grades, he insisted on carrying more than his share of the pack, and strode easily along with the graceful hip-swing of the true hillman.

But "Too darn obliging!" was Dickinson's comment, though he could not help feeling grateful as he looked at the man stalking ahead with all the cooking-outfit on his shoulders in addition to his own kit, and an apparently useless little box.

"Say, Beelzebub," he asked, as they halted once for a rest, "what's that box of yourn for? You ain't never used it any that I seen."

"This, sahib," returned the other, in his own dialect, as he opened the lid and showed it full of cotton wool, "is for the holy image when the heaven-born have procured it. . . That is to say, if indeed they can prevail against the wizard's magic," he added doubtfully.

"Magic, my eye!" snorted Dickinson. "I'll bet it ain't no more than the usual bull-con that these beggars always throw."

"Nay, sahib," insisted the guide earnestly. "I myself have seen. Did not his Highness,

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whom the Lord preserve, tell you that once before I came with one other to get this same image? No? Listen then; it was thus: We came by stealth and by careful inquiry found the place where the holy one lives—a great hole in the mountainside. Now the jungle path to Rangpo passes along a ridge across the ravine, whence from afar off occasional passers-by may view the wizard as he sits in contemplation on a platform before his dwelling, and here the devout leave offerings, not daring to approach nearer, for the place is guarded by many devils.

"Here we lay up for two days, watching his comings and going, and at last one evening, finding our opportunity, we crossed the river and climbed by a most evil path to his abode. Now we cast lots, and it fell that my companion should enter and search for the image while I stayed without to watch for the wizard's return. At this falling of the lot I rejoiced greatly, for I was in truth afraid. And it happened that as I stood on this platform looking down the pathway, I heard a cry of mortal terror from that other, and turning my head I beheld that he stood as one paralyzed. And, as I looked, out of the inner darkness there sprang upon him a great devil, black and with eyes of green flame, and rent him with roarings. At that my liver was turned to water, and I fled as a mountain goat flees, coming at last to the valley, I know not how. This is a true tale, sahibs, by my father's beard."

THE third evening found them far up on the higher slopes, where rocky peaks stood out like islands from a sea of cotton-woolly clouds hanging low in the valleys. They had left the stunted oak and lean birch far behind, and were out on a long ridge among the wintry pines. Here lay the bleak road to Rangpo.

The guide led them to a point from where, looking across the ravine, they could see an outjutting ledge of rock, behind which, he averred, was the wizard's cave.

"At sunset, sahibs," he stated, "it is his custom to come out on that platform and make incantation. If it is the heaven-born's will to encamp here, the holy one may be observed unseen."

It was the heaven-born's will and, finding a little hollow where their fire would not be seen, they sent the guide out to watch for the fanatic's appearance.

It was considerably after sunset when they were called, and both jumped up, eager to get their first view of this mysterious personage who inspired such fear among the natives.

"Bring along the glasses, Snake," suggested Dickinson. "We might want to look at him closer."

The ledge on the opposite side presented an uncanny sight in the chilly moonlight. On it stood a veritable skeleton of a man, tall and angular, with a mat of tousled hair over his face and a thin beard streaming well below his waist; naked, except for a wisp of rag about his loins, in spite of the chill in the air.

As they watched, this fearsome creature threw up its arms and began to caper about like a giant stork, leaping and twisting till the watchers almost imagined they could hear the cracking of the desiccated joints. The figure loomed distorted through the night-mist and accompanied its antics with a shrill whistling and chuckling noise. The dark ravine took up the sound and threw it back and forth in mysterious echoes which crept up to where they crouched, whispering and sighing all about them.

Ram Dass fell flat on his face, fingering the iron amulet which hung from his neck.

"Heaven protect us!" he moaned. "He talks with the devils!"

O'Shane watched the whole performance critically.

"The man's either a plain maniac or else he's very clever," he decided at length. "I fancy the latter, and this is just to impress any chance passers-by."

"Yep, guess you're right, Snake," assented Dickinson. "What's the program now? Here, Ram Dass, you fool, get up. The devils ain't goin' to eat you. Listen now. Does this bug go out after his song and dance, or does he stay right home?"

"Nay, I know not, sahib," came the tremulous reply. "But even if the sahibs would face the evil spirits no attempt can be made now, for the path is impassable by night."

"Much safer by day, too," agreed O'Shane briefly. "Let's turn in, and we can go devil-hunting to-morrow."

IT WAS early dawn when the watchful guide awoke them and announced that the old man was making preparations for departure. They hurried to their vantage-point. Presently the

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tall figure appeared from behind the jutting rock and peered up the ravine, evidently sniffing the air like an animal. The daylight made him seem more frightful, if possible, than before, accentuating the gaunt uncouthness of his shape. After sniffing for some minutes he suddenly dived into his cave and reappeared with a net and two long poles on his shoulder.

"Looks like he's goin' fishin'," muttered Dickinson. "But what's he up to now, Snake, fumblin' about that rock?"

O'Shane brought the glasses to bear.

"I can't quite make out. He seems to be undoing a rope from a staple or something. Yes, now he's letting out several feet of it. Now he's tied it again. Wonder what that's for."

"Shuttin' a door inside, p'raps," Dickinson guessed.

The grotesque figure gave a final look round and scrambled off up the ravine. Soon he was lost to sight.

"Now's our chance, Snake," exulted Dickinson. "If the old geezer's gone fishin' he won't be back for hours. Hey, Ram Dass, where are you off to? Gettin' cold feet?"

"I do but hasten to get the box, excellency, for surely the sahib's wisdom and valor will prevail."

The way down to the river-bed was comparatively easy, and Ram Dass showed them a natural bridge formed by a fallen tree at a point where the stream shot with an oily swirl between steep banks after roaring down a magnificent cataract above. But the opposite side was a very different matter. The path was a mere goat-track winding in and out on the face of the almost perpendicular cliff.

"Good places here to fall off," observed Dickinson cheerfully, standing with his toes projecting over an overhanging ledge, while he gazed unconcernedly down on the frothing river more than a hundred feet below.

"Yes," assented O'Shane, joining him, "or for our over-solicitous friend to push us off. Our danger with him commences after we've got the thing, and we'll have to watch him all the time."

A little farther up the pathway Ram Dass stopped and announced with great embarrassment that he dared not go any farther, for fear of the devils, against which his amulet was powerless. They threatened him, but nothing that they said would induce him to go a step nearer that fearsome cavern.

"Aw, let him stay!" muttered Dickinson at last. "He won't be any use to us anyhow, an' we can't waste time talkin' here. How much farther is it, you skunk-meat?"

"Nay, sahibs, it is but half a mile. The sahibs can not miss it; and I will stay here and pray for their protection."

They hurried up the steep path, which now grew barely perceptible in parts, and they were wondering whether they had not indeed missed the place when they suddenly found themselves on the rock platform. The unexpected nearness of the unknown danger brought them up with a start.

"Look to your gun, Dick," cautioned O'Shane. "This devil thing of his is mostly imagination, but it's clear that something killed the other fellow, even if it was sheer fright."

They peered carefully round the corner. Before them yawned the mouth of the cave, dark and empty. Dickinson sniffed.

"Phew, stinks like jackal. Unclean sort of old crab our magician must be. Wonder if devils smell like a hyena-den? Well, stinks alone don't hurt any. Let's——"

O'Shane grabbed him by the arm and swung him sprawling on the ground, rolling over with him, just as a dark shape hurled itself at them out of the blackness and was pulled up spitting and clawing the air within a foot of their faces. A wild scramble for safety almost rolled them over the edge of the platform, but the beast was held by a stout collar and a rope leading back into the cave.

They rose shakily. A black panther was snarling before them.

"——!" muttered Dickinson, "that was a close call! If he'd 'a' got us, he'd 'a' chawed us up awful. Gosh, what a big brute! I never seen a bigger, nor never at all at this elevation."

O'Shane hazarded that the man must have got it as a cub and acclimatized it.

"But why don't it claw him up once in a while?" persisted Dickinson. "You can't tame them things."

"That's what I was wondering," replied O'Shane. Then, as a thought struck him, "Hold on, I've got it! That's what he was doing with the rope this morning—letting it out. Come on."

He ran to the clumsy staple in the rock-front and hauled on the rope. Sure enough, the animal was drawn back, struggling and

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choking, into a regular den hewn out at one side of the entrance, where it crouched and spat, glaring green hate out of its luminous eyes.

"Cunning old scoundrel," muttered O'Shane, as he tied a good knot and tested it carefully. "So that's all his magic and his devils! Well, I guess it's the lot. Come along in, Dick, and scout for the god now."

The cave was a dark, evil-smelling hole, bare enough and filthy enough to suit any medieval hermit. A crude fireplace on the floor, with a few cooking-utensils and a pile of furs in one corner, completed the furniture; but of the idol not a sign was to be seen.

"Suppose he ain't got it after all!" blurted Dickinson, after a hasty look round.

"We must just look," said O'Shane. "Anyhow he can't have buried it in this floor. Hunt around the crevices; got matches?"

Fortune favored them. In a few minutes O'Shane gave an exclamation which brought Dickinson running. In his hand he held a little figure, the exact counterpart of the one they had brought with them.

"Here's five thousand shiny rupees, right here," he jubilated. "Fifteen hundred good hard iron dollars! Dick, shake hands. And now for a swift fade-away out of this smelly hole."

"Hey, ain't you goin' to put the other one in its place?"

"No, the old man's not likely to miss it at once, and he won't know any one has been here if we let his watch-dog out again. I'm going to circumvent our faithful retainer down there. He's too darn anxious to get the thing into that box, *which he is to carry!* Well, we'll hand him the fake and make him happy, bless his innocent heart!"

RAM DASS was loud in his praises of the heaven-born's cleverness and daring. Never were such valiant sahibs; and assuredly his prayers had prevailed. But what of the devils. How had they been vanquished?

"Of that later," interrupted O'Shane, inwardly resolving to regale the man with a wild tale of horror and mystery. "For the present, let us depart from this haunted place as rapidly as may be. Here is thy god—" he nudged Dickinson and drew his attention to the quick gleam in the Hindoo's eyes as he stowed the image in its cotton-wool bed—"and do thou walk in front, Ram Dass."

The man started off without demur. In fact, so readily did he take the place assigned him that they wondered whether they had not maligned him in attributing ulterior motives to him on that path.

They had proceeded some distance when Ram Dass stopped short with an exclamation of pain.

"What's up now," demanded Dickinson.

"A thorn in my foot, sahib, mm-m-m! If the sahib will lend me his pocket-knife—a thousand thanks. But let the sahibs go on. I will come up with them in a few minutes."

They strode ahead. "He may be all right," observed O'Shane, "but we may as well shove him in front again when he catches up."

Suddenly, "Look out, Dick, the bank's loose!"

He hurled himself backward as he felt a tremor beneath his feet.

Dickinson clutched at him and leaped. But it was too late. With a grinding shiver, a large slice of the pathway lurched outward, poised a moment, and then, before they could spring clear, went down with a rush and precipitated them into the fierce current beneath, which whirled them out of sight in an instant.

O'Shane rose with a dizzy sense of pain in his head and a feeling of helplessness in his limbs. He heard a frantic splashing behind him and a far-away voice, "Hang on to this, old man," and something was thrust under his arms on which he rested.

He felt himself rushed along while a sickening recollection of the great waterfall below shot through his brain. He was aware of Dickinson panting at his side in a mad endeavor to push to the bank, and struggled feebly to help him. Then—the slow suck of an eddy contending for them against the current—a final effort from Dickinson, and they swung in under a great rock and in another moment he was scrambling unassisted to the shore.

He sat for a long time regaining his scattered senses. Dickinson also appeared to be thoughtful, and vicious grunts escaped him from time to time. Finally he waded out to where the heaven-sent log still swung round and round and, catching it as it floated past

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him, dragged it ashore. He examined it closely and swore aloud.

Then he turned to O'Shane seriously.

"Snake, there ain't been any heavy rainfall since we come up here an hour ago is there?"

"Of course not," replied O'Shane wonderingly.

"Nor no earthquake what might loosen a bank?"

"No."

"Well, tell me this: Why didn't that dog-gone slice of road cave in when we come over it first?"

O'Shane's mind was still too dizzy to speculate on the mysterious workings of Nature.

Dickinson continued, "Now just direct them eyes of yourn at this section of young tree shaped like a Y; what's it look like? It looks like strut, don't it, what's used to shore up a weak bank?"

O'Shane nodded.

"An' it's new cut, ain't it? Quite new."

"Well?"

"Well, that's all; an' I'm goin' gunnin' for that doggasted guide an' make him eat that long tooth of hisn along with some more."

"I don't follow," said O'Shane. "Why?"

"You don't follow?" Dickinson exploded. "All right, look a-here. That strut's new cut, not more'n a hour ago—look at it. An' just about an hour back that dog-eatin' coon got a scare of devils and wouldn't go no farther. What for? An' just before we come to this place he got a thorn in his foot an' made us lead the trail. What for?"

A light commenced to dawn on O'Shane. "You mean——" he began.

"I mean that it was all a fake; that he undermined the bank, an' figured on the falls below to finish the job, as they would have done if it hadn't 'a' been for that same strut what he put in to hold the bank till we come along."

It was clear to O'Shane now; the whole crafty plan as the cunning Hindoo had worked it out from the beginning. Then, as the thought, he began to laugh, softly at first, and then in a cramping paroxysm that stretched him helpless on the ground.

Dickinson gazed on him with indignation, then, as the humorous side of the question was borne in on him, he had to join.

"Oh, don't let me laugh," murmured O'Shane weakly. "It hurts the back of my head. But just think, he imagines he's got the goods and he's hugging himself with the idea that he can trade with the priests on his own account."

"The polecat!" snorted Dickinson. "Well, we'll never catch him now. But we sure will let the Rajah know what a trustworthy servant he's got."

IT WAS late afternoon two days later when they arrived at Kurseong. The first man they met was a tea-planter friend of theirs. He looked a while, and then came running with outstretched hands.

"Hello, hello! I'm glad to see you. I thought you fellows were drowned."

"Oh, you did? How so?"

"Why, I met your servant this morning and he said that you had both gone down in a landslide and been carried down the Rungeet Falls."

"Where d'you meet him? Here in Kurseong?"

"Yes, on the Lower Road."

Dickinson looked at O'Shane, then, "Say, d'you happen to know if the Rajah of Kalapani is here?"

"Yes, he's been staying at the rest-house for the last couple of days."

"Well," announced Dickinson emphatically, "we've got urgent business with him. See you later."

He turned impressively to O'Shane. "D'you hear that, Snake? He come right back to the Rajah."

O'Shane's lips had set in a hard line.

"And that means that he wasn't acting on his own account. The Rajah put him up to it! That's why he was so anxious for us to take him and no other. But why? Five thousand rupees wasn't worth it."

"Huh, that's easy," grunted Dickinson. "Dead men don't tell no tales, and you knew a heap too much about his little opium-game."

O'Shane nodded.

"Come on," he said shortly. "We've got a big account to settle."

YES, the Rajah was in; would the sahibs be pleased to give their names?

"Never mind the names," growled O'Shane and, brushing the man aside, he strode into the vestibule.

O'Shane swung the door open and stood

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on the threshold, with Dickinson looking over his shoulder.

The Rajah half rose from his chair. His mouth opened to speak, but no sound issued from his throat, and he sank back, moistening his dry lips, while his eyes goggled from his head.

O'Shane affected not to notice his confusion, and stepped briskly in.

"My dear Rajah sahib," he burst out with effusion, "I see you're delighted to set eyes on us again. Returned from the dead, eh?"

He took the flabby hand in his grip and ground the obtrusive rings into the fingers till the Rajah winced.

His quick eye spied the image lying in a corner of the room, where it had evidently been hurled in a rage. He went and picked it up.

"And I see that your faithful servant brought you the idol safely. I must confess that we did him the injustice to think he intended to steal it after our mishap. And, if I am not mistaken, you have the money all ready and waiting for us in that bag."

The Rajah made a heroic effort. "No, Mr. O'Shane, you are mistaken; that is not money," he mumbled. "Besides, I do not owe you anything, not one piece; that thing is false, 'fake,' as you say."

The voice rose to an angry whine.

"What?" cried O'Shane. "A fake? Surely your faithful servant brought it to you direct after receiving it from me just before our accident. But I see you're joking; that's a bank-bag all right."

"It is not, I tell you."

"Ah, now, Rajah sahib, don't tell lies," purred O'Shane. "You wouldn't break your agreement with us, would you?" His voice took on the smoothness of silk. "Not while I possess such dangerous information about your palace-cellars."

The Rajah quailed at the reminder, and his eyes glared baffled hate. He made two or three attempts at speech, then,

"Take it and go," he snarled in a choking voice.

"Good!" said O'Shane in a businesslike tone, taking possession of the bag. "So much for the original agreement. And now, after the whip, corn. Listen, Rajah sahib. I've got another of these things for sale. D'you care to buy?"

He carelessly produced the original from his pocket.

The Rajah leaped up with a glad cry.

"My dear Mr. O'Shane, why did you not say you were joking? Give to me."

"Nay now, Rajah sahib, you haven't said whether you will buy it."

"Bub-but I have just paid; five thousand rupees are in that bag."

"Ah, that, as I just said, was the original agreement. But this thing has gone up in value, and there has been added the price of two lives very nearly lost through an—accident. We reckon them at another five thousand each."

The voice, in spite of its bantering tone, was hard and level, and when the Rajah looked into the steely eyes he knew that here was no room for haggling. But instinctively he broke into the true native whine.

"Gentlemen, I am a poor man. I can not afford to pay so much price for brass image."

"Yes, yes, we know about that, I don't have to remind you. But if you're not anxious, I'd just as lief keep it. I've an idea that I could find out something about its real value."

The Rajah's anxiety was patent.

"No, no, gentlemen. I will pay. Only let me examine once just to see if it is real thing."

"Nay, Rajah sahib, you're a slippery customer. Your check first for ten thousand rupees."

"But if I don't examine, how I can tell if thing is genuine?"

"You've got to take your chance now. Surely there aren't more than two of the things extant. Sign, and you get it."

The Rajah squirmed in a frenzy of doubt and eagerness. Finally he hurriedly made out a check and handed it to O'Shane, who scrutinized it critically, and then passed over the idol.

The Rajah pounced on it with a cry of delight and,taking it to the light, examined it closely. He gave an exclamation of satisfaction, and fumbled with his fingers at a certain point. He pressed. It seemed stiff. In a fever of impatience he rapped it against the window-ledge. With a click the little figure hinged forward on its pedestal and a blaze of scintillating red fire flashed out in the sunlight streaming through the window.

The idol was filled with rubies.

O'Shane finally broke the long silence.

"Ungh—can you *beat* it!" was all he said.

"What do we care?" jubilated Dickinson. "We make forty-five hundred dollars out of the deal!"

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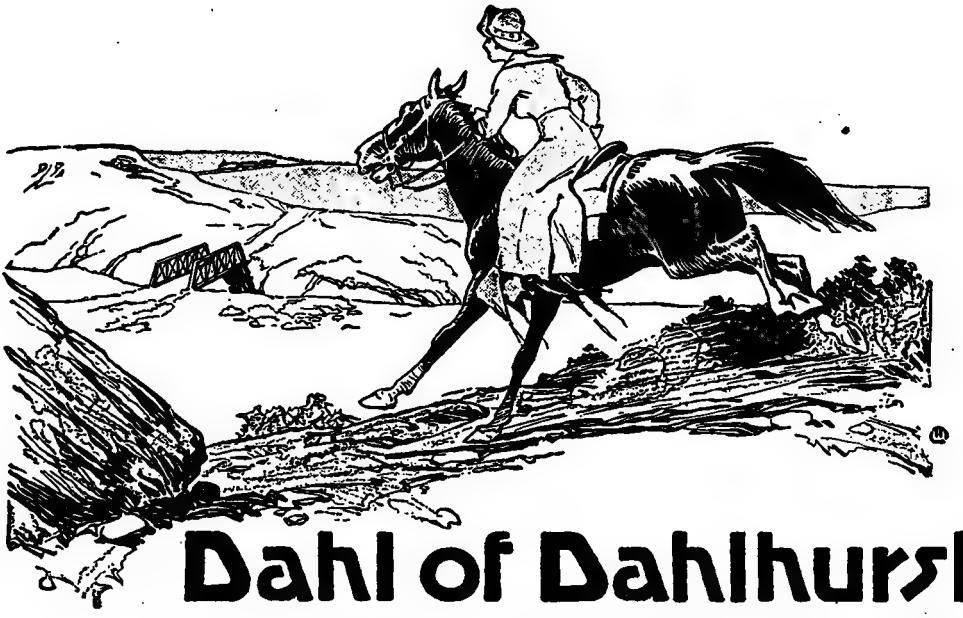

Dahl of Dahlhurst

by George Frederic Stratton

CHAPTER I

THE COLD GLASSY GLARE

DAHL of Dahlhurst dropped off his mare as he reached his home bungalow. But instead of leading her to the corral, he turned her loose to make her own way to that alfalfa-stocked haven.

His wife stood on the big porch, a temptingly dimpled little figure in a trim gown, and her eyes roguishly twinkling from under a big silver-buckled sombrero as he strode toward her—his boot-heels denting the 'dobe and his eyes gleaming welcome beneath a forehead corrugated with perplexity.

She sang out, "That's a perfectly exact imitation of a Captain of Industry overloaded with steam and enterprise. But I never saw you turn your mare loose to unsaddle herself before."

"Trimpy's down there."

He lifted her from her feet as easily as if she weighed no more than a ten-year-old girl, and kissed her.

"That's better!" she cried. "That's like Dolly of Dollyhurst—instead of like Stonycreek! How did they treat you at Stonycreek, Dolly? Did they lift you off your feet and kiss you, the same as you do me when I beg for something?"

A hard look came into his eyes and the corrugations in his forehead crowded together. He tossed his hat and quirt into one corner of the porch, dropped into a great armchair and growled:

"We're up against the cold glassy glare at Stonycreek, little wife, and everywhere else, it seems."

She perched on the rail in front of him and, fixing her big brown eyes upon the blue ones which twinkled back at her, she drawled:

"Was it a cold glassy glare like this?"

But there were mischievous dimples in the corners of her mouth and the eyes were brimming with sympathy—and a little touch of inquiry.

"Pretty much like that; not quite so fierce."

She slipped her hand into the pocket of his coat, pulled out a packet of cigarette-papers and tobacco, rolled one and handed it to him, exclaiming:

"Come back to earth, pardner! Do you

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mean that the men here in the valley—the ranchers and the cowboys and the mine-gangs up in the canyon—are giving you the cold glassy, too?"

"No indeed! We're all one unit about here, not only on power and irrigation, but on other things."

"Then why those puckers on that manly brow, Dolly? With such a bunch as we have in this valley we can defy the world. We can even defy Mr. Snowcroft of Stony-creek."

"Eh! What? What do you know about Snowcroft, Elna?"

"Very little, but oh my! Listen! That new cowpuncher of daddy's was down here yesterday. You know he used to work for Snowcroft, and just before he rode away he said, 'Mrs. Dahl, tell your husband to watch Snowcroft. He sure needs it!'

"'About the dam?' I asked; but he shrugged his shoulders and he said, 'It's above the dam he needs watching. Four, miles above!' and then he rode off."

"Four miles above the dam!" exploded Dahl. "Well, he did hand it to you, Elna. They can't touch us there! It's the *dam* they're all trying to muss us up on—Stony-creek and the great Volt Electric Company and the railroad, too, I guess. They're all framed up against us!"

"The railroad, Dolly? Guess again. What's the railroad got to do with it?"

"Do you remember the delay on that last consignment of cement? How it got side-tracked and switched into Wyoming, and switched back and delayed a full month in the delivery to us?"

"I'm a rememberer, all right! What's the answer?"

"They're doing it again, my girl. The last shipment should have been here two weeks ago. That's why I went over to Stonycreek—to see the freight-agent. He knows nothing, absolutely nothing, he says. Two cars of cement are hidden away somewhere, and our work on the dam and the power-house is stopped completely. It's done on purpose! The railroad and the big Volt Electric are working together to cripple us. We've only two months to finish or our charter will be forfeited. That's the whole glossy proposition!"

"Can't you get an extension of time, Dolly?"

"I wouldn't give a spavined cayuse for our chance! The Stonycreek Railroad owns the Legislature. So does the Volt Electric. We're to be froze out, sure. The Volt Company let us alone at first, so that we could do the biggest part of the work. Now, they'll block us—run us over our time-limit and then come in and buy our plant at ten cents on the dollar if they feel liberal. If not, they'll make it five cents. They own every power-plant in the State, and they are not going to stand for one competitor—even a little one!"

"Fierce, isn't it?" said Mrs. Dahl. "And you-all are going to lie down and take the brand, I suppose?"

He made no reply, but the muscles in his wrists stood out like steel cables as he grasped the arms of his chair; and the set of his jaws and down-slant of his eyelids all answered.

"You're a pretty fair-looking young person when you get a grouch like that," laughed his wife. "I see they'll have to rope and hog-tie *you* before they get to the branding."

HE GRUNTED disgustedly; rolled another cigarette and, as he smoked, his eyes wandered, somewhat aimlessly, across the mile of prairie to the mouth of the Thunder Canyon in the Tehama Mountain. There he saw, glistening white in the sunlight, the big dam, and below it the half finished walls of the power-house. Silhouetted against the dam was a hoisting-engine, and Dahl's scowl intensified as he saw no steam issuing from it. The work was stopped for cement.

His wife perched on the arm of his chair, took his head between her hands and turned it away from the dam and toward the mush-room town of Dahlhurst.

"It kinder gives a feller a rest sometimes," she murmured, "to turn from what has to be done to what has been done. Do you remember the day the Bar K boys brought you in here; roped you out of that store in little ole Stonycreek and freighted you and your stunning assortment of swagger merchandise up to the old Last Chance Mine ore-bin? Not a house nearer than father's—a mile away! No town; no Dahlhurst; not a customer in sight; nothing but Dahl! And now, look at it. Plenty of houses. Good hotel. The Dahlhurst Stupendous Department-Stores. A church. A school and a red-hot weekly paper. And all your doing! That's going some, little hubby.

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Don't irrigate the landscape now with pearly tears because of one little set-back. I've got a hunch that you'll 'Meet the enemy and they are ours' yet!"

"You've been the hunch that's helped me with all this, right from the start, Elna. Right from that first day when you told me you were looking for shoes for your pony, in French shapes and swagger effects. That put me up to getting a blacksmith, and a blacksmith is about the first thing to start a ranch-town with. I wish you had another hunch now about that cement."

"I've got it!" she laughed. "A fine assortment of hunches in the latest styles and colors constantly on hand. Watch me!"

She ran into the house, returning with a magazine, open at one of the picture-pages.

"Here it is, Dolly!"

"Call that a hunch? That's a gasoline motor-wagon."

"It's a hunch, stupid! Have I got to run a kindergarten about this? Look! The Northern Idaho Railroad doesn't belong to the Stonycreek, does it?"

"Certainly not! Along most of their way they're pretty keen competitors."

"That's glad tidings! And the Northern runs through Tonopah—north of here?"

"Yes; forty miles north."

"We're getting along, Dolly. Now, order more cement by wire, to be sent over the Northern road. Then get one of these gasoline tractors and hitch on a couple of wagons, and freight in your cement from Tonopah. Also an' likewise, snap your fingers at the Stonycreek Railroad, and the Volt Electric Company, and at Mr. Snowcraft and all the rest of little ole Stonycreek. Savvy? That's a very fine hunch, sir! All wool and a yard wide, and sold for no fault."

There had been no smile on Dahl's face as she told her plan. His eyes narrowed to pin-points and the wrinkles in his brow had deepened and bunched together. As she finished, however, a broad grin spread over his features and he sprang to his feet, exclaiming:

"I guess I'll take that one. It looks as though it would fit, all right."

"Thank you, sir. Shall I wrap it up and send it home?"

But he was off the porch and on his way over to the telegraph-office to send his order.

CHAPTER II

A RANCHMAN SITS IN

WHEN ranchmen become interested in business outside of their own line, they have the same point of view as they have regarding handling cattle or sheep. Red-tape is practically unknown. Their lives have been spent in meeting emergencies, and "doing it now." A manager who would deem it necessary to wait for a directors' meeting to get authority for some change in equipment or policy would soon find himself estimated as a hired man instead of a boss.

Thus it was that Dahl, manager of the projected Thunder Canyon Power Company, which was formed of the surrounding ranchmen and mine-owners, felt no hesitation in carrying out his wife's suggestion, at once although it would involve an expenditure of several thousand dollars. After telegraphing his order for cement with lengthy and specific instructions for instant shipment, he rode over to Bentler's.

Bentler was the biggest cattleman of the Mojada Valley; his partner in the promotion of the town of Dahlhurst, the president of the new Power Company and, incidentally, his father-in-law.

"You've twenty minutes to catch that night-train, Dolly," exclaimed the old ranchman after they'd had ten minutes' consultation. "Go over to Salt Lake and get one of those motor-wagons, if you can find it. If not, go on to Denver, an' if not there, rush to Chicago. If you can't make sure of fast freight, bring it through by express. I'll take Ayland, the engineer, and his gang over the Tonopah trail in the morning and strengthen the Toltec Bridge. We'll show those Stonycreek coyotes that they can't play hoss with us. We're on the map an' we'll be there when ole Stonycreek's a bone-yard."

Dahl was on his mare as the stockman barked out the last words. A furious gallop got him to the station in time, and the next morning he was in Boisé. Ten miles out of that town, on the Salt Lake train, they pulled into a small way-station and, as they passed a few freight-cars on the siding, Dahl saw one marked "D. & R. G. 3122." It was the number of one of the cars of cement which had been supposedly lost, and the number was impressed on his mind because

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the thirty-one and twenty-two were the ages of his wife's older sister and his wife, respectively.

Although he knew that eight hours would elapse before another train came through, he jumped off, determined to see why that car was there instead of at Dahlhurst.

He strolled along the track and saw a freight-team backed up to the car, loaded with cement. As he drew nearer, a loud, cheery voice greeted him:

"Hello, Dolly! Are you lost, or have you meandered over here to buy us out?"

It was Bud Fanning, one-time foreman of the Bar K Ranch, but now contracting-teamster in Red Bluff.

Dahl greeted him as cheerily:

"Just dropped off for a drink, Bud. Forgot to get one when I came through Boise. Anything doing?"

"Sure thing! Wait till we throw out these last bags and I'm with you."

They strolled over to the Out of Rope-Reach Saloon and, after the preliminaries, Dahl asked the teamster where the cement was going.

"Up to the Lost Fork Canyon," responded Bud. "The Volt Electric Company's raising their dam, there—forty feet or more."

"Haul much cement for them?" asked Dahl, carelessly.

"Quite a few. About two cars a week, though there's four cars come in this week. Devlin, the boss at the dam, is plumb peevish over it. Says they're rushin' it in too fast to take care of. These cars have been here a week. Some demurrage on that, eh?"

"Have you got the number of the other car, Bud?"

"Sure have." He referred to a bunch of dirty papers and added, "S. and D. 20216."

Dahl scrawled down the number and, as he did so, Bud glanced around and then said, in a low tone:

"They're stacking the cards on you, Dahl. Sure are! Those cars were consigned to you, an' they switched 'em in here."

"I know it!" growled Dahl. "They've been playing dirt, all right, but that doesn't make our name Dennis. They're a pin-head crowd to think they can hold down Dahlhurst with all that country back of it."

"They've got the country sized up right," demurred Bud. "It's the men back of it they haven't got the breed of—you an' Bentler an' the whole crowd. Say! What yer goin' to do with your electric current?"

"We'd planned to wire it over to Stonycreek and give them power and light at fair prices. But we'll cut 'em out, now! They're too peevish. We'll wire the other way, to Tonopah, and leave Stonycreek in the dark."

HE REACHED Salt Lake that night, searched for the motor-wagon he wanted, without success, and then took the afternoon-train for Denver. Before ten the next morning he found the make and weight of car he was looking for, and established a record for quick purchase. Five minutes after he entered that garage the wagon was bought and was chugging down to the freight-station with himself on the seat with the driver.

He dashed up in to the General Freight-Agent's office and asked for an interview. A clerk blandly told him that the agent was engaged with one of the officials and could not be seen until the afternoon. Dahl wrote on a slip of paper:

I'm Dahl of Dahlhurst. If I can see you for half an hour—or fifteen minutes—I can put you wise to all the freight-haulage of the Tehama Valley. Must leave here on the noon-train.

Two minutes later he was in the private office receiving cordial greeting.

"We've heard of you, Mr. Dahl, and of Dahlhurst, although it's not on our line."

"It will be in two or three days," grinned the promoter. "I'm just shipping the first locomotive for the Dahlhurst and Tonopah Railroad. That'll put you in connection with us!"

"Wha-what!" gasped the agent, in astonishment.

"Well, we're getting started," explained Dahl.

Then he told of their trouble with the S. and D. Railroad, and their intention to ship over the Northern, ending by an appeal for the quickest transportation possible for the motor-wagon. In response Waterman grasped his desk 'phone.

"Give me outward-bound freight-office. Hello, Jackson. This is Waterman. There's a motor-wagon just delivered. I want it sent out on the 11:30 fast freight. What's that? No car? Not even a flat? I'll see to that."

He rang up again:

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"Give me yardmaster's office. Hello, Phillips. Run out a switch-engine and put a flat-car over at the auto-loading platform, at once. No, don't let anything prevent it. It must go out with the 11:30. *Must*, I say!"

"That's the treatment for us!" said Dahl as the agent hung up the receiver. "We're growing—growing fast, and you'll find it'll pay to look after us a bit."

"How about your own road, Mr. Dahl? I understand that you and your partner built that twenty-mile branch to connect with the Stonycreek Road. How can you divert freight to us without bankrupting your own road?"

"It isn't ours, now. After we got it built and in operation, the S. and D. came in with an offer for it, and we sold. We didn't lose anything on that, and if they lose out now it's their own fault. They're standing in with Stonycreek and the big Volt Electric Company, and our mine-men and ranchers are wild. We'll tie to Tonopah after this, if you'll stand back of us."

"You bet we will!" exclaimed the agent. "I'll be out there before long and look over the place and the prospects."

Dahl shook the extended hand heartily and, hurrying down to the freight-yard, saw the motor-wagon loaded and the car coupled on the fast freight. Then he bought his ticket for the noon-train back home.

Although he had done speedy work he groaned as he thought of three days gone without any work on the dam. As he paced the waiting-room a messenger boy came in calling, "Telegram for Philip Dahl!"

Opening it he read:

Cement at Tonopah. Bring a score of sand-hogs back with you. Will work twenty-four hours a day after this. BENTLER.

Dahl scurried around Denver and got his gang of laborers in time for the night-train.

"God bless old Bentler!" he exclaimed, as he dropped into a seat, more tired than he had ever before felt. "He's got more fight in him than any three men of half his age!"

CHAPTER III

A RIDE WITH DEATH

MRS. DAHL'S horse was loping easily back from the dam, where she had gone to gloat over the splendid progress the three shifts of men were making. The gasoline-wagon, with two wagons in tow, was bringing in material as fast as needed from Tonopah, and the anxious lines on her husband's and on Engineer Ayland's faces had smoothed into smiles as the completion of the plant seemed to be easily possible within the now very short time-limit.

As she drew near to her home a hulking man in a prospector's red shirt and high boots, riding a broken-kneed broncho, came down the trail from the North. It was Bedrock Lisby, a man of well-earned evil reputation. He leered at her as he passed, but she knew it was a friendly leer, for she was the only woman in the settlement who ever dared to visit the little crippled son of Bedrock.

The moment she had passed she heard a husky hail, "Hello, Bedrock! Where yer goin'?" and the surly answer, "Stonycreek, doggarn yer!"

She rode up to her house, tied her horse and went in, busying herself quickly with a bunch of magazines and some pastry from her pantry. When these were in a neat package she again mounted and rode over to Bedrock's cabin, in the foot-hills a couple of miles north.

The poor little dwindled figure of the eight-year-old motherless boy was in the doorway as she rode up. Almost with a sob she saw the intense, concentrated, eager gleam of welcome in his eyes, and compared that with the endless, lonely, weary days and nights when he saw no one—not even his father, for that gentleman made frequent excursions into the mountains or to the saloons in Stonycreek, which visits often lasted for a week—sometimes two.

She sang out a cheery, "Howdy, Steve!" and tied her horse to the post of an almost roofless shed. As she turned her eyes she caught sight of a saw hanging in that shed—a big hand-saw, new, bright and keen, and she wondered what fit of industry had attacked Bedrock.

"Oh, Mrs. Dahl!" murmured the boy, "it's so long since you've been here. I—I—didn't mean that exactly though. It seems so long."

"Well, Stevie, that big husband of mine takes up almost all of my time, you know. Now look! Here is a bunch of new magazines."

"You're so good," he said wearily. "I've read all I've got two or three times over."

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"And here's one of those jolly seed-cakes," she laughed. "You called them jolly once, you know."

"Did I? I've forgotten that, Mrs. Dahl. I forget so much, you know. I—I—guess I have to."

She was puzzled by his reply and by his manner. Usually he was full of boyish eagerness to talk. Now, he seemed constrained and reserved.

"Mrs. Dahl!" he broke in suddenly, "what time does that gasoline-wagon come in from Tonopah?"

"It gets to the dam about one o'clock every day, Stevie, and runs back again when the men have had their dinner. Why?"

He started violently at the question. Then he gasped,

"Wha-what time does it cross the bridge?"

"You mean the Toltec Gorge Bridge?"

"Yes. That's the only one, isn't it?"

"The only one, Stevie! It crosses that—let me see—just about eleven o'clock."

"And what time is it now, Mrs. Dahl?"

She looked at her watch. "Five minutes to ten, Stevie."

A look of terror came into the poor little face. He stared at her for a moment and then gasped:

"I've got to tell it, Mrs. Dahl. I've got to! But it wasn't dad. It sure wasn't! Don't think that!"

She crossed over to where he stood leaning against the rude wall, steadying himself on a crude home-made crutch.

"What is the matter? Tell me Stevie."

"That bridge!" he gasped. "If they cross that bridge it'll go down sure!"

"Go down! What do you mean, Stevie? What has happened?"

Then, as a quick piercing suspicion came to her, she added:

"Do you mean that it has been injured?"

He nodded.

"It's fixed for 'em, sure! But it wasn't dad. Sure it wasn't, Mrs. Dahl, although I guess he'd kill me if he knew I told. But I can't help it. Those men'll go down with that car, an' p'r'aps they'll be always crippled, like me."

She clutched at the wall for support, as the horror of it flashed over her.

Toltec Gorge! Thirty feet deep with a mountain torrent at the bottom dashing furiously over a bed of wickedly jagged rocks. It was death—certain death, not injury—to plunge off that bridge with a heavy motor-wagon and two five-ton trailers.

But she recovered in a moment:

"You've done the best you could, Stevie. Now, I'll do the best I can. If my horse will do it in time, I'll save 'em!"

She grasped her gloves and quirt from the rough table, rushed from the cabin and, as she untied the horse, she fondly stroked his nose.

"Carry me this once, in time, Billy! Just this once!"

BEFORE the last word came from her lips, she was in the saddle, rising to the first stride of a furious plunging getaway.

"Fifteen miles inside the hour!" she gasped again, almost hysterically, as Billy settled into a long, steady, distance-annihilating stride. "Inside the hour or—— What?"

But the saddle-work quieted her nerves, and soon she steadied her horse, knowing well that good riding would count. The trail was firm, and mile after mile slipped behind the powerful animal, to whom her light elasticity was nothing. Of his strength and spirit she had no doubt. But she knew that it takes unusually good wind, even in a trained speeder, to reel off fifteen continuous miles at a four-minute gait.

But he held to that gait without urging, until they passed a point eight miles on the way. Then she glanced at her watch.

"Thirty-one minutes, Billy! Splendid work! Too good, my boy. Ease down, a little!"

On again, more steadily now. Once she passed a ranch-wagon, going south, and pulled up long enough to implore the driver to hurry to the dam, and tell her husband, or the engineer, of the trouble at the bridge. Then on again in a quick burst of speed, for she was dismayed at the few moments' delay. Ten seconds late meant the wreck of the motor-wagon, perhaps fatal delay at the dam, and—death.

So she rode on; at one moment despairing, the next hopeful, and always keeping her eyes fixed on the great Dog-Hole Boulder which was three miles the other side of the bridge, and around which the motor-wagon must come before it would be visible to her.

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She reached a point two miles from the bridge and a joyous light came into her eyes for she knew that she had succeeded. The motor's speed, loaded, did not exceed six miles an hour. Although Billy was showing signs of distress she felt safe, and she steadied him down again.

In a few minutes the motor-wagon came round the boulder, and she urged Billy into his speed once more, although it hurt her badly to do so. But she felt that she must take no chance. Another mile was covered and then came the disaster which kills many a good horse on the plains—especially along the foot-hills—the treacherous gopher-hole.

Billy plunged a foreleg into it and went down, throwing her ahead of him.

But she knew how to fall, and was instantly on her feet, while the horse came up on three legs—the fourth broken.

With a wail of sorrow for the splendid brute and a gasp of terror for the consequences, she flung her arm over his neck, kissed that neck passionately and dashed away. One mile to reach the bridge with the car chugging merrily on to its fate!

She ran, and walked, and ran again, throbbing, despairing and sobbing, and the motor drew nearer. She thought, hysterically, that if she had one scrap of red to wave perhaps Sternitt, the driver, would recognize and heed the danger-signal. But she had nothing, and she staggered on, her fear doubled by the thought that her evident distress and struggling flight would make the driver speed toward her, to see what caused it. He might even cut loose from his trailers.

She made her last dash as the car drew close to the bridge, rushing across and screaming: "Stop! Stop! Bridge is wrecked!" As the front wheels of the motor stopped on the first plank, she staggered to one side and sank to the ground.

TWO or three minutes to recover breath, a can of water from the torrent to moisten her throat, and she was able to tell the two men about the bridge. Sternitt walked across, peering over the side-guard timbers at every few feet. Then he came back.

"It's the center stringer; sawed pretty nigh through. It wouldn't carry a one-horse wagon—light!"

"Have you got a gun, Sternitt?" she whispered hoarsely.

He nodded.

She glanced across the plain at Billy, standing in pathetic helplessness.

"There's only one thing to do, Sternitt. You know," and again she threw herself on the ground and buried her face on her arms, while Sternitt strode across the bridge and down the trail. So she lay, waiting for the shot. But the wind was north and she knew the sound would not carry. Presently she raised her head and at that moment there was a puff of smoke and Billy staggered and went down.

Once more she dropped her head on her arms, sobbing piteously, while Passlow, the helper, stole round to the further side of the wagon and tinkered with the equipment.

Three hours later, two six-horse wagons loaded with men and timber dashed furiously down the trail to the bridge, and the next moment she was in her husband's arms, getting the comfort she sorely needed.

CHAPTER IV

A MAN-HUNT IN THE CANYONS

BENTLER, the big cattleman, all whipcord and bullhide and whalebone, rode back down the trail toward Bedrock Lisby's cabin. He had been out to the bridge after hearing of the trouble, had passed Dahl and his wife on their way home and had found Ayland, the engineer, in charge of the repairs. Ayland's gang had already carried the bags of cement across the bridge, loaded them on the horse-wagons and sent them to the dam, while the motor-wagon and trailers had been turned back to Tonopah for another load.

"There'll be no delay, Mr. Bentler," the engineer said. "We'll work all night and the bridge 'll be ready in the morning, as usual."

So Bentler turned back, for there was another streak of business which he felt more interested in, just then.

He rode up to Lisby's cabin, the crippled boy gazing eagerly at his visitor.

"Hello, Bub!" greeted the ranchman, cheerily. "Where's your father?"

"Have you come from the bridge?" the boy exclaimed "Did she get there in time?"

"She sure did, my boy. Some riding that! Where's your father?"

"He—he's gone over to Stonycreek," stammered the boy. "He went there yesterday."

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Bentler dismounted, sauntered to the shed, took down the saw and came back to the boy.

"Where'd your father get this saw, Buddy?"

"He—he—er—a man brought it in."

"Who was the man?"

"I don't know, Mr. Bentler. I—I never saw him before. Say! It wasn't my father did it. I'm sure it wasn't!"

"It's the other man I'm after," smiled Bentler. "Now you tell me an' mebbe that'll help your dad. Did that man ride in here?"

"Yes. I heard the horse outside, but I didn't see it. The man came after dark, an' I was in my bed, over there. Then he and dad went out in the shed an' talked."

"You saw the man, Buddy?"

"Yes, I did. He was very tall an' thin, an' he had a cut on his neck—a long cut just under the ear."

"A new cut?"

"No. It was healed up, but it showed plain. An' he had sorrel hair."

Bentler nodded meditatively a couple of times. Then he asked:

"Ever get on a horse, Bud?"

The boy's eyes glistened hungrily.

"Once or twice dad's taken me up behind him when he wasn't going far, an' was goin' slow."

"That's good! Now I'm goin' to take you over to the ranch for a little visit."

"Oh, I daresn't!" gasped the boy. "If dad came back an' found me gone away he'd be awful mad!"

"He won't be back for two or three weeks," said Bentler. "He's got some business to attend to, an' you can't stay here alone all the time."

He rolled the saw in a scrap of burlap, tied it and the boy's crutch to his saddle, mounted and, with an easy swing of his powerful arms, seated the boy behind him. So they rode over to his ranch, where he immediately ordered a fresh horse and rode away to Stonycreek.

HE CAME back late the following afternoon, going direct to the Dahl and Bentler office, where he found his partner, who greeted him with, "Did you get Lisby?"

"Sure did. He's been showing more money than he's ever been seen with before, an' drinkin' some. He sent for Snowcraft to bail him out after we put him in the pen. But Snowcraft said he didn't know him at all. Never heard of him, he claimed."

"We'll refresh Mr. Snowcraft's memory, all right."

"Which the same we may if we can find the other fellow," said Bentler.

"Do you know who he is?"

"No one knows. He rode into Stonycreek, Tuesday, on a blaze-faced sorrel, an' went to Snowcraft's office for an hour or more. After that he had supper at the Canyon Hotel, an' then rode away."

"Came out here to Lisby's, of course."

"Plumb sure. An' no one's seen him since 'ceptin' one fellow—a boy from the Crazy B ranch, who was coming in on the south trail good an' early. He saw our man turn up into the Rawhide Canyon. That's where he went, sure; an' if he knows them mountains it'll be like trailin' a coyote to get him."

"I suppose you put the sheriff on to him?"

A bitter snort of fierce disgust broke from the cattleman:

"Sheriff! He's the same brand as all the Stonycreek herd. I got a warrant, though the justice bucked because he claimed there warn't no evidence. Then the sheriff says he ain't got no authority to take a posse up the Rawhide Canyon. 'Tisn't in his county!"

"Not in his county, Bentler? Where is the line?"

"Don't know an' don't care! The sheriff's standin' in with Snowcraft an' his gang, an' we've got to play our own game. I'm going after that fellow myself. If we can get him we can rope Snowcraft. Can't do it with Lisby. That other fellow was the go-between!"

Dahl's eyes shone fiercely.

"And if we can corner Snowcraft," said he, "we'll perhaps be able to get at the Volt Electric folks. They're working together; that's sure! I'll take a hand with you in this man-hunt, Bentler."

The cattleman shook his head.

"The dam comes first of all, Dolly! Ayland's a good engineer, but he works on orders. You've got to stay here an' give orders. We can't take no chances now. The time's runnin' mighty short."

"I suppose you're right. Who'll you take with you?"

"I've got a bunch of three or four cut out. Baldy Peters knows the Rawhide Canyon

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as well as he knows our horse-corral. He's goin'."

Dahl shook his head slowly.

"You stand no show, I'm betting. That fellow's got two full days' start of you."

"He daresn't leave the mountains, Dolly. I've posted a thousand dollars reward for him. We'll get him!"

AN HOUR later the sturdy old rancher was mounted on a fresh horse with a group of his cowboys and two pack-horses. Thoroughly filled cartridge-belts and Winchesters gave them a business appearance as they rode down the side-hill trail. Rawhide Canyon entered the mountains sixteen miles south of Dahlhurst, and they planned to go up in the mouth that evening and camp.

Three days later they were in the deepest recesses of the Tehama range, reading trail and signs of trail as patiently and keenly as the Indians who formerly hunted those mountains. It was hard, weary work; riding along rock ridges, descending long slopes in long diagonals and ascending again on the other side of the gulch; stumbling along the beds of gloomy canyons, often in a mountain torrent reaching to horses' bellies, and with eyes and ears constantly alert for danger, for they did not know the man they were after.

He might be within gunshot at any moment, with an instant unfailing aim. Of all hunting none is so dangerous as the hunt for a wary, perhaps desperate criminal. But to men who have once been at it in wild country no hunt is so enthralling and enticing.

Often they sighted deer and sometimes bear, but they shot nothing. They were on a still-hunt for other game. They rode without talking while they threaded the heavy brush. In the opens they tailed off into a long line. They avoided sky-lines and were keyed up to intense wary suspicion of abrupt ravines. Often on bare rock they lost the trail and spent hours in circling searches to regain it. But they always picked it up.

One day it led to the timber-line where snow, continual snow, covered every vestige of green. But the hunted had left no trail there. He had plunged back and down into the depths of the ravine.

It was on the fourth day that they heard a shot echoing in the silent air far down the canyon which they were traveling.

"Starved out, I reckon," muttered Bentler. "He's gettin' game."

Then they separated, Bentler and two of his men riding down the canyon, while the other two dismounted and climbed to the ridge, working silently and stealthily over to the cross-gulch from which the shot had come. Just around the next sharp turn they saw a horse, saddled but riderless.

"The blaze-face sorrel!" exclaimed Bentler. "That's the horse. He's stopped runnin' fer hidin' now. We'll tie the horses here, boys. Buck, you'll have to stay an' watch for him. He may sneak back on us an' stampede the bunch."

Buck scowled discontentedly.

"You stand as good a chance at the game as we do," muttered Bentler. "If he comes down here, shoot—but not to kill. He's no more use to us, dead, than a coyote. Come on, Hous!"

It was some relief to them to change from saddle to foot, for they had reached a height where the cross-currents of air were bitterly keen, and the sun was hidden behind dull-bellied clouds which covered the near-by peaks. Stealthily and cautiously the two men crept along the edge of the canyon torrent, their eyes keenly alive for the man, and for instant cover if necessary. They reached the cross-gulch and crept up. There they found a fresh trail, with blood drops on the stones and brush.

SUDDENLY a shot came from the overhead ridge and, as Bentler and Hous dropped behind boulders, an answering shot came from a crevasse halfway up the wall of an almost perpendicular bluff. A duel had commenced between the men on the ridge and the hunted man in that crevasse. Several shots were exchanged, and Bentler, watching the ridge, saw one of his men go down. At the same moment Hous fired at the crevasse, followed by a return shot which took his trigger-hand.

"Two men down!" growled Bentler "'Twon't do. We'll have to finish it."

He fastened his eyes on the crevasse and in a moment saw a rifle-barrel projected. Then he fired and the man stumbled forward, falling headlong down the forty-foot wall.

Bentler bound up Hous's hand with his neckerchief and they made their way to the

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fallen man. They were joined by the two who had come along the ridge. Baldy Peters had been hit in the right arm, like Hous Trimpy. As Bentler turned the dead man over Hous exclaimed:

"*Hombres!* It's Greaser Gower. He's wanted in Nevada fer killin' a sheriff an' two deputies. I might have known it was him. He allus boasted that he allus took a man's trigger-arm fust. Look at that scar. It's Greaser, all right! There's five thousand reward on him—dead or alive."

"You boys can have it if you ship him out from Stonycreek," grunted Bentler. "I'd sooner give five thousand to have him alive an' facin' Snowcraft."

They tied the body on the blaze-faced sorrel and made their way down the canyon. At the mouth they separated—two of them riding into Stonycreek to ship that five thousand dollars' worth of human flesh back to Nevada, while Bentler and the two wounded men rode north into Dahlhurst.

There they found a cyclone of dismay and apprehension.

Dahl had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER V

BLASTING

"DAHL! The water's slacking off!"

It was Ayland, the engineer, who thus greeted Dahl as he rode up to the dam on his usual inspection, two days after Bentler had started on his man-hunt.

"Slacking off?" retorted Dahl. "How can that be? We've been having steady warm weather. The snows up there must be thawing, day and night."

"That's a fact," agreed the engineer. "We ought to be getting more water, instead of less. But I noticed the falling off yesterday afternoon."

"I'll ride up the canyon and look for the trouble," growled Dahl.

"Hadn't I better go with you?" suggested the engineer.

"No! I'm suspicious of everything now, Ayland. One of us must be here at the dam, night and day. We're up against a bad bunch—a bunch that'll stop at nothing to block us."

He rode on up the canyon, critically noting the stream, which at some points, where it ran over a few rods of fairly level bed, widened out in a smooth but rapid current. In the next reach, perhaps, it was tearing furiously over an eight or ten foot ledge, or boiling around some great boulder which lay in its path.

But Dahl was familiar with all the obstructions, and he found nothing unusual until he reached a sharp bend in the canyon, two miles from the dam, when a dull, heavy detonation echoed back from the rocky wall.

"Blasting!" he muttered, questioningly. "Who can be blasting up there?" and on the instant he remembered the cowboy's warning to his wife: "Tell your husband to watch Snowcraft. It's above the dam he needs watching. Four miles above."

He urged his mare along the steeply ascending trail, his eyes and ears intently alert. But he traveled for over another mile without seeing anything but the thousand-foot walls of the canyon on either side of him, and the rearing snow-clad peaks up at the divide.

At last he heard the sound of rock-drilling and the harsh creaking of a hoisting windlass. He dismounted, tied his mare and walked farther up the canyon, the sounds of picks and the voices of men becoming clear.

He scrambled up a thirty-foot steep rise in the rugged side-hill, reaching a small bench covered by a clump of scrub-oak and sage-brush. Lying full length among that brush, concealed from view, he saw operations which loaded him with apprehension, disgust and bitter rage. Before him was a side-gulch entering from the canyon and descending sharply between two of the mountains, and here a dozen men were at work. Close to the canyon and within ten feet of the rocky bed of the stream was a mine-hoist over a new shaft. As the filled buckets came up, Dahl could estimate the depth of that shaft at about fifty feet.

Close by the shaft a small fissure had been broken in the rock wall of the stream channel, and through that a torrent of water—perhaps one-third of the full stream—was rushing down into the side-gulch.

Fifty yards down that gulch he saw the weird, black, square opening to the tunnel of the abandoned Last Chance Mine. When he had last seen that, the entrance had been planked up. Now it was again open, a yawning, black, forbidding hole in the mountainside. Just beyond it were two tents—a cook-outfit and a big sleeping-tent for the laborers; and on the further side of

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the gulch was the red-faced burly foreman talking to Snowcraft.

Dahl saw it all—the whole scheme—as clearly as if he had been Snowcraft himself. Under a pretense of reopening the old mine, that shaft was being sunk to meet the underground tunnel. Then, perhaps within a few hours, one heavy and well-placed charge of dynamite would blast out the rock bed of the stream and turn the entire torrent into that shaft, and so on and down through the tunnel into the side-gulch.

Except for a few small contributing streamlets below, not one gallon of water would or could reach the new power-house at the canyon's mouth. Although there could be repairs and reconstruction it would take time. It might necessitate the building of a long flume to avoid those pretended mining-operations. Snowcraft's purpose was to delay that final blast until a few days before the time-limit of the power-company expired, and then they would be utterly unable to demonstrate the operation of their plant in time to save and hold their charter.

DAHL scrambled down into the canyon and walked to where the bunch of men were working. He strode over to the Stonycreek manipulator and demanded:

"What's the meaning of all this, Snowcraft?"

Snowcraft, long and gaunt with fox-trap jaws and cast-iron creases at the corners of his mouth and eyes, snarled:

"What business is it of yours?"

Dahl looked the man from the eyes down to his leggings and then up again.

"You're stealing our water! That's the business. I call it atrocious rascality!"

"What's that! How dare you, sir, accuse me—a member of the Legislature of our great State—of stealing! Stealing and rascality!"

"You've hit it, all right! What did you break through that ledge for? Don't you see that a third of our water's running down into your gulch, now? That is, I suppose it's your gulch, although I have doubts."

"Look up the records and solve your doubts!" exploded Snowcraft. "I have a lease of the Last Chance Mine property, and can do as I please—and *will*. It's up to you to take care of your stream. When you get your little one-horse power-house built, bring your lumpers up here and build a flume."

"You've no right to divert that stream, or interfere with it. There's no lease possible to give you such right, and you know it, Snowcraft! Set your men to rebuild that bank at once and build it securely or there'll be trouble!"

"Will, eh! Who'll make it?"

"I'll take a hand in the first round!" warned Dahl, "And the courts 'll finish the job. Even a legislator—a Stonycreek legislator—can't play a game like that."

He pointed his finger at the break in the rock bank, turned on his heels and strolled back to the canyon, while Snowcraft edged up to the burly foreman and talked in low but very emphatic tones.

Dahl had walked fifty yards toward his mare when he was hailed from behind and, turning, saw Blaisdell, the foreman, following.

"Yez goin' off in too much av a hur-r-ry, Dahl. Let's talk th' matter over, an' settle it that way."

"There's only one way, Blaisdell. That break must be fixed at once; and that shaft's too near the stream-bed, and it's sunk there purposely to damage us. You know that!"

"Yez know a lot 'bout minin', I'm thinkin'," sneered Blaisdell, "an' about Mr. Snowcraft's business. But ye'll know more before yer through!"

And on the moment Dahl was seized from behind, a sack slipped over his head and he was thrown to the ground.

"Run a line around his legs, byes!" ordered the foreman, as he pinioned Dahl's arms. "That's it! Now pick him up."

There were four men at him, and Dahl ceased his struggles after his first furious lunges. He was carried down into the gulch and thrown into a dugout in the side-hill, the door to which was of heavy plank. There he was cleared of the sack and cords.

"Yez'll have to stay here a while," grinned the foreman. "It's little we like th' manner av yer talk ter Mr. Snowcraft. An' he's gone back ter Stonycreek ter git a war-rant ag'inst yez for-r threatenin' language, an' he'll send th' sheriff after yez. Keep aisy now! Ye'll maybe git lodgin' to-night in th' Stonycreek pen, an' if not, ye'll be safe here. I'll see ter that!"

Dahl made no reply. He seated himself on an old nail-keg. The heavy plank door

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was closed and a big timber strut braced against it. Blaisdell strode away, roaring out illustrative and decorative expletives to his gang to get busy again. Peering through the big cracks of the door, Dahl saw that the efforts of the men were being concentrated at that shaft.

"They're straining every nerve to get down to that tunnel," he muttered to himself. "And the instant they do, they'll blast out that intervening ledge and turn the whole stream in. That's what they're holding me for—so that I can't go back and bring a bunch up here to stop the game."

He dropped his head on his hands to think, groaning, "And only three days more!"

Then he groped around the dugout, hoping faintly to discover some possible chance of escape, but it was only a twelve-foot hole in the ancient mountain, and any breaking through the plank door would only put him in the midst of that bunch of sand-hogs; a class of workers whose life is spent in smashing nature and smashing men.

He heard the cook's yell for supper and saw half the gang go over to the tent while the other half were working like tigers at the shaft.

"Won't stop one minute for supper!" he gasped. Blaisdell kept slamming around the workers, feeding himself from a bowl of frijoles he carried, and profanely urging speed.

When the second half of the gang had been fed, the cook came to the dugout with supper for Dahl. The door was opened for him by one of Blaisdell's men, who showed a ready gun in his holster.

"Here's yer grub, Dolly," said the cook. "Yer'll have better quarters to-morrow, I reckon, down at the Stonycreek pen. Yer'll have a table, anyhow."

He put a big platter in Dahl's hands and set a can of coffee on the ground and, as he was very close, he murmured, "I've turned your mare loose, Dolly, with a note on the saddle-horn tellin' where yer are."

Then, going from the door, he called back sarcastically:

"If yer want napkins or wine, just press th' call-button. This here's th' toniest restaurant in th' Tehama range. We strive ter please."

A thrill of joy and hope came over Dahl. In the excitement and dismay of the past hour he had forgotten his mare. Now, if the cook had turned her loose, she would make her way back down the canyon and give the alarm, and save the water—if not too late.

CHAPTER VI

COWMEN TO SADDLE

ALTHOUGH Dahl had told his wife not to wait supper for him that evening, she did wait until eight o'clock, and then poutingly nibbled some, alone.

"We're connecting up the generators at last," he had told her that afternoon, "and I want to be on hand. Ayland hasn't been in bed for three nights before this, but we're close to the finish, little woman!"

So, although there was a pout on her lips, there was none of it in her heart or her eyes as she thought of the fight and victory of those masterful men—her father, her husband, and her brother-in-law, the quiet, determined engineer, Ayland.

She sat out on the porch gazing across the prairie at the outlines of the great mountains, standing in silver and dark purple in the luminous moonlight. Down in the foothills the white gleam of the great walls of the dam stood out boldly against the background of the black, mysterious, gloomy canyon; and every few minutes the sharp hiss of steam and a warning whistle told that the hoisting-engine was on duty.

Nine o'clock came; and ten. Then she saw a single horse, riderless, coming across the prairie toward her home, and in a few minutes recognized it as her husband's. She sprang out, calling to it. As it nosed up to her she examined it closely. It was saddled and bridled in perfect order. Not a strap was broken or chafed. Not one graze on knee or shoulder or haunch. Then she saw a paper partly wound around the saddle-horn and tied.

Running to the lamplight at the window, she read:

Dahl's locked up in a dugout at the old Last Chance Mine. Feeling well but he'd like to get home. It'll take a score of good men to do it.

A minute later she was in the saddle, galloping over to her father's—two miles distant. Bentler had just returned from his man-hunt in the Rawhide Canyon.

"The ole Last Chance Mine!" he growled. "It's been abandoned for years. Who is there up there to claw at Dolly?"

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But he did not wait for an answer. He strode out to the bunk-house, and ten minutes afterward his day-herd—a dozen in number—were dressed and mounted and starting with him for the canyon. Elna sprang into her saddle to go, but her father sternly protested:

"It may be easy!" he insisted, "an' there may be work that no woman belongs in."

"I'm going to sit-in in this game," she laughed, a little wildly. "He's my pardner, an' I'm going to see a fair deal!"

She dismounted, dashed into the house and into her father's room, where she found his spare cartridge-belt and a .44. Then, hastily kissing her mother, she mounted and followed the galloping cowboys.

AT THE power-plant they picked up Ayland and, as there were a few horses there, they were able to mount another half-dozen lithe eager men. All were sure that Dahl's horse could not have come down the canyon, or he would certainly have been seen; for the trail around the dam was narrow, open, and with workmen on it all through the night. The horse must have wandered into some cross-canyon and got out of the range at some distant point.

Night-riding over a rough mountain-trail can not be fast work. An hour elapsed before they reached the old Last Chance Mine and saw, with intense surprise, the gang of men working under the glimmer of a score of lanterns.

Bentler sprang from his horse and, followed by his boys, climbed across the rough ground into the gulch and faced the burly foreman, Blaisdell.

"Where's Dahl?" he demanded fiercely.

"Mr. Dahl's on the way to th' pen at Stonycreek. He come up here this afternoon an' threatened Mr. Snowcraft wid bodily inj'ry an' the like; an' th' boss swore out a war-r-rant against him, an' sent th' sheriff up here after him."

"You lie!" exploded Bentler, "or if you don't it's 'cause you're out of practise. Look for that dugout, boys!"

Blaisdell grinned again—a grin that was peculiarly triumphant. He muttered some order to a man, who sauntered over to the shaft. At the moment when the dugout had been found, and opened, a sharp piercing whistle was heard. Instantly every one of Blaisdell's gang disappeared behind rocks, but Blaisdell himself, with triumph still glittering in his eyes, turned to Bentler's group and yelled:

"Blast coming! Git, you fellows!" while at that moment one of his gang sprang up into the canyon and gave the same warning to the two men who were herding the horses on the trail.

Every one got cover, and the blast went off. Twenty feet of the solid ledge between the mountain torrent and the mine-shaft went into the air, mixed up with the hoisting-shears and windlass, tools and lanterns. As the débris settled and the dust floated off in the breeze, Dahl sprang out from behind the huge rock where he had stood with his wife. One of Blaisdell's men had hastened to let him out of the dugout, and there was no proof of his imprisonment.

Dahl glanced at the torrent now rushing into the shaft and, turning to Blaisdell exclaimed fiercely:

"Finished up quick, didn't you!"

"That's th' style av us!" grinned the foreman with intense defiance. He followed with a long sentence teeming with oaths, hard-rock slang and mucker's idioms; all expressive of his opinion of cowboys.

"We're not th' like av little cowboys loafin' in high-back saddles," he concluded. "We're men; we ar-re, d'ye mind! Men who wor-rk, an' can fight as well as wor-rk!"

With the elation at the successful blast and his defiance of everything and every one but his own employer, he had worked himself into fighting frenzy. As his fist shook threateningly at Dahl the trouble commenced, for the promoter, six feet away, with his hands at his sides, covered the distance in one lightning spring, driving his fist under the snarling profane mouth; and Blaisdell, half lifted off his feet, went back and down.

BEFORE he could struggle up again every man on each side was in the fight. Cowboys and sand-hogs seldom have love for each other, and blood was up, and soon flowing, in the wickedly rough work which followed. Queensberry rules among such men are ignored, even if known. The heavy miner's boot is used as readily and impartially as the fist; while gouging and biting are frequently enlisted in the cause.

Dahl's wife had scrambled to the summit of the great boulder when the trouble

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commenced, and she cowered there now, half paralyzed with horror at the confused and apparently death-distributing mêlée. But it was on rough ground, giving very insecure footing, and every clinch—which occurred frequently—almost instantly brought each pair of men to the ground, where, although the fight continued, it was at too close quarters to permit severe blows.

It was wind that decided it all. The cowmen, who for every minute of every day were in quick action and whose perpetual saddle-work had trained off every ounce of spare flesh, had wind which stayed with them; while the sand-hogs, more heavily built and accustomed only to slow movements, were soon puffing like gas-motors. Suddenly one of them broke from the edge of the mêlée and dashed down the gulch, followed by others as fast as they could break away.

The scrap was over.

Blaisdell stumbled to a rock, dropped on it, gasped out a lengthy spasm of invective that, for original profanity, picturesque idiom and far-embracing comprehensiveness made a record for the Tehama Mountains and Valley. With one eye closed and the other swelling, while a severe cut in one corner of the mouth caused him to spit out his words from the other corner, he delivered his opinion of his own bunch of fugitive sand-hogs, while the cowboys gathered around him with open and sincere expressions of awe and admiration.

But the three big men—Bentler and Dahl and the engineer—had instantly gone to the stream. The blast had been cleverly designed, and so well executed that not a gallon of water was going down the canyon to the power-house All was plunging down into the shaft.

Ayland savagely shook his head.

"We can't make repairs without diverting that torrent!" he exclaimed. "We'll have to go above and cut out a new channel."

Dahl groaned bitterly:

"On such ground—almost solid rock—it'll take weeks to do that; and we've only two days!"

"Our plant's finished," cried Bentler. "The State Legislature 'll never play this card against us! We can't turn wheels without water!"

"They've got us, Bentler!" moaned Dahl. "They'll hold us to the letter of the charter. We must be running by the first, or we lose! The Legislature 'll do anything that the Volt Electric orders; they and the railroad."

Mrs. Dahl had sidled up to her husband. Now, with a hand on his arm she exclaimed:

"Phil! Look at that tent. It's long enough for the short flume you'll need here; and strong enough, too!"

The three men gazed down the gulch at the big sleeping-tent. Then the engineer's eyes turned and met Dahl's, and he nodded.

"You're the most resourceful engineer in the outfit, Elna!" he exclaimed, as he placed a bloody-knuckled hand on her khaki-clad shoulder.

Bentler had stridden over to his bunch of cowmen.

"Come on, boys! We're through with play now. There's work before us!"

THEY had the big tent down in five minutes. They found axes and cut some heavy pine-trees for timbers. They sequestered Snowcraft's ropes and tackle, bolts and spikes, while Blaisdell protested with an eloquence acquired at wharf-operations in San Francisco and construction-operations on mountain railroads.

They worked like tigers—intelligent tigers—and when the rosy tints of a rising sun gleamed up through the canyon, and reflected back from the western snow-clad peaks, the quadruple thickness of canvas was in place, and the stream was again in its own channel.

Dahl sauntered over to the cook-tent, where he found Pinky lying on the cook-table smoking cigarettes. He pulled a roll of bills from his pocket and handed three tens over, remarking:

"That's to square you for turning the mare loose, Pinky. It was sure thoughtful and plumb full of usefulness!"

The cook slipped both hands into his pockets and backed away, shaking his head.

"Not so, Dolly! Not so you'd notice. I'll have to do more than that to square myself with you. You haven't forgot the time you pulled me out of that muss at the What Cheer saloon. I'd got a good start then down the 'wide and crooked' an' I was sure due to lose a whole year's savings. Now see here! Snowcraft may law you fer butting into his mine-outfit; an' if he does, you look up the boundary-lines. There's some queer things 'bout the lines through here. Billy Berkhole, the ole county-surveyor, can put you wise—if you can find him.

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There's some sure queer stakes both through this range and down at Stonycreek; an' Billy knows it!"

Dahl grasped the cook's hand heartily.

"Cut loose from Snowcraft's gang, Pinky, and come into Dahlhurst. I'll give you a good job."

"I'll do it, just as soon as I get my wages from him."

Bentler strode up.

"Dahl!" he exclaimed, "I'm goin' to stay up here with the boys to see that Blaisdell doesn't put his bunch at work again. Ayland's already started down the canyon. He says he's goin' to race that torrent an' get his intake gates open by the time it reaches the power-house. That'll start the wheels, my boy, and light the Dahlhurst lamps, if it *is* daytime. All the same it'll prove-up on our charter; and Snowcraft and the coyotes he's working for 'll lie down."

"Come on, Elna!" shouted Dahl to his wife. "Let's hurry down and see the wheels go round!"

CHAPTER VII

STEALING A SMELTER

"GOING to Stonycreek, to-day?" exclaimed Mrs. Dahl to her husband at the breakfast-table the following morning.

There was a fascinating little toss of her head, and an inviting little pout on her lips which expressed her disapproval.

"That's glad tidings, Dolly. Hadn't we better get a legal separation at once, instead of meanderin' all over the face of nature on separate trails and calling ourselves 'pardners'? You haven't spent a full day at home for three weeks!"

"You're always glad to see me back. And you'll be more than glad this next time, when you see what I bring home in my little ole pants-pocket. I'm going over to Stonycreek to steal a smelter. I've got a hunch that a nice copper-smelter set down alongside that new club-house of the Hyacinth Shirt-Waist Club would be some—and then a few! Copper and blue 'll jibe together all right, won't they?"

"I'm not going to ante-up any more encouragement to your awful crimes. I've helped you to steal the freights from the Stonycreek Railroad, and turn them onto your Tonopah Gasoline Railway; and I've helped you to smash poor Mr. Snowcraft's new mining project. That's enough! After this, all you an' your frivolous pardners will get from me will be precepts of gold and a shining example. Beyond that every gent 'll have to kill his own snakes!"

"Hello! There's Pinky," exclaimed Dahl, as a man appeared at the screen-door. "Come right in, Pinky. Had your breakfast?"

"I sure have!" smiled the cook. "Good mornin' Mrs. Dahl. I've got through with Snowcraft; or rather he's got through with me. He paid off the bunch yesterday, an' said he'd stop mining up there till he found where you an' he stand."

"Did he charge you up with that capital supper you gave us that night, Pinky?" asked Mrs. Dahl.

"He didn't know of it," grinned the cook. "Blaisdell didn't tell him, for both he and Snowcraft got plumb busy shootin' off opinions of each other. He called Blaisdell and all his sand-hogs a set of picayune, cowardly lay-downs, an' it took the whole office-force an' several others to keep the foreman from eatin' up Snowcraft. The boss wears an eye now that's a match for the one your husband gave Blaisdell."

The joy on Dahl's face shaded into eager sternness.

"Now, look here, Pinky, I didn't get anything clear from you that night about those boundary-lines. It was no time to talk about it then. What do you know?"

"Just what I once heard from Berkhole, the old county surveyor. He was a good man, but he'd sometimes get on a little bat; an' it was one of those times he mumbled: 'There's been queer work on that west line of the county. Some day, some fellow 'll get wise an' get busy; and Stonycreek 'll get the surprise of its life!'"

"You've no idea where Berkhole is now?" asked Dahl.

"I hadn't, night before last; but I made some inquiries yesterday. When he left here he went over into southern Utah, a hundred miles away from any railroad or court-authorities, an' there he married the five widows of a big rancher. They weren't grass. The rancher was dead, all right!"

"He's got his boundaries mixed now," laughed Dahl, "whatever he did before! Well, there are other surveyors. Don't speak of this matter to any one else, Pinky.

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Now, you can go on wages right from today. We'll add the twelfth section to the Dahlhurst Stupendous Department-Stores —delicatessen—and you can take charge."

"Frijoles, chile-con-carne an' hot tamales with café-au-lait! Say! They're plumb locoed over at Stonycreek because you've run your light-wires over to Tonopah, an' left them with only coal-oil."

"They've fought us from the start!" growled Dahl. "From the very day I was kidnapped by the Bar K boys and brought up here to start a store in the old ore-bin they've sneered and thrown blocks in the way. Now we'll take a hand and teach them to let us alone. Watch me!"

HE CHANGED his plans, going to Denver instead of to Stonycreek, and receiving the parting information from his wife that he was a "glossy proposition." At Denver he sought, and after some delay secured, an interview with the vice-president of the Northern Idaho Railroad.

"I'm thoroughly glad to see you, Mr. Dahl!" welcomed that gentleman. "We've been looking into the possibilities of your valley and I shall be glad to get some specific information from you."

"You'll get it, all right! I don't make a seven-hundred-mile trip across the Rockies just to say 'good day.' I've got information—pay-streak information—in large and well-assorted variety."

"Like your department-store, I suppose," laughed the vice-president. "I understand that you run a rather novel assortment."

"Horseshoeing and banking; lumber and underwear; freight-wagons and baby-carriages; everything to eat, wear and work with. The business is there, Mr. Ramsey, and we're business-getters. Now, we want a railroad to Tonopah."

"What are the prospects, Mr. Dahl?"

"They're mixed, but they all point the same way—to Dahlhurst. I guess you've heard that they've struck fine ore—thirty-dollar ore—at the Lonesome Cove Mine. They've got down to the six-hundred-foot level, and they've got ample capital to get the stuff out."

"Yes. We've been looking into that."

"That mine is about midway between Tonopah and Dahlhurst. They'll have to get their ore to a smelter, and if you'll run a track through I guess we can get a smelter at Dahlhurst practically no time afterward."

"A smelter at Dahlhurst!" exclaimed Ramsey in surprise. "That's a prospect, all right."

"It can be done if you'll help. The big mine at our canyon—the Tehama Mine—is freighting all their output to the Stonycreek smelter. But now a great smelter will be built in our town."

"Well, where can we help, Mr. Dahl?"

"By building that branch road. If I get assurance of that, I'll go to Stonycreek and tell the smelter-company that, if they move to Dahlhurst they'll get the big ore output of the new Lonesome Cove Mine. I've already got assurance of that. Also, I'm able to tell them that the mine-company at our canyon—the Tehama Mine—is tired of freighting twenty miles over to Stonycreek, and that they'll build their own smelter if the Stonycreek plant isn't moved. That would put that old smelter completely out of business, for nine-tenths of the ore it reduces comes from our mine."

"You've certainly got the details worked out, Mr. Dahl; and I'm very glad to be able to tell you that at the last directors' meeting it was practically decided to build that Dahlhurst branch. Have you anything to offer in terminal facilities?"

"The whole thing, Mr. Ramsey. My partner—Mr. Bentler—and I will give you ten acres for the station and yards; and I'll bet that you'll get free right of way across the ranches from Tonopah to Dahlhurst. Now say! Give me a letter stating that the moment the ground is broken for a smelter at our town, you'll start on your tracks."

"The president will be here to-morrow, Mr. Dahl, and I think I can then promise you that letter."

DAHL used the rest of that day in searching for a good surveyor. Finding one, he commissioned him to take what helpers he needed and survey the western boundary-line of Canyon County, which contained both Stonycreek and Dahlhurst Railroad.

"Let no one know who has engaged you for this survey or what line you are surveying," he warned. "It may show nothing at all, or it may show some queer things, and be a big ad. for you."

Then, armed with the railroad president's letter, he went back to Stonycreek. During

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the next week he was back and forth several times between that town and his own, consulting with the smelter-company and with the two mine-companies, and with his own partner. At the end of that week he joyfully sent a telegram to Mr. Ramsey:

Stonycreek Smelter-Company has decided to move to Dahlhurst. We have given the land. Will start building at once. DAHL.

CHAPTER VIII

A SENSATION IS SPRUNG

BEFORE the walls of the new smelter were up to the roof-plates, the Tonopah Branch of the Northern Railroad was in operation. Vice-President Ramsey came out to the valley, spent a couple of days with Dahl and, thoroughly impressed with the promising future of the two mines and the smelter, and the wonderful little town of Dahlhurst, gave orders to his construction-engineers which resulted in the forty miles of tracks being laid in sixty days.

Over at Stonycreek there was a dismal damp blanket covering every tradesman and dealer. Two hundred men were employed at the smelter, and they and their families would shortly be lost to Stonycreek. Nor was that all. Since Dahl had established his motor-wagon service from Tonopah, scarcely a ton of freight had been shipped over the Stonycreek Railroad. The ranchers throughout the great valley, filled with enthusiasm and admiration at the lightning enterprise and energy of the Dahlhurst promoters, and disgusted at their past treatment by the "pin-head" authorities of Stonycreek, had either deferred shipments until the new railroad was built or had shipped through Tonopah—using Dahl's motor-wagon train to connect.

Among the Stonycreek officials the blanket was of double thickness. A mysterious surveyor with three assistants had been working over the west boundary-line of the county; and, although they had sometimes come into Stonycreek for supplies, they refused an iota of information as to why they were making that survey, or for whom. And those officials saw a blow coming, but could make no preparation to meet it, for they were entirely in the dark as to whom and from whom it would come.

But it was not long deferred. Dahl strolled into the mayor's office one day and handed in a petition signed by every rancher in the valley for a special election to vote on moving the county-seat from Stonycreek to Dahlhurst. Mayor Tibbetts almost collapsed with mingled feelings of scorn, indignation and dismay. He called scorn to bat first. Tossing the petition back across the table, he sneered:

"You're thoroughly ignorant, I reckon, of the fact that a call for a special election must be made by a majority of the voters of the whole county!"

"Whatever I may be ignorant of," said Dahl, "there's one thing I know; and that is that this petition's going to the county-commissioners and that, if they turn it down, that election 'll be held at Dahlhurst instead of Stonycreek."

The mayor slammed his fist down on his table.

"If you fellows think that the commissioners 'll waste a moment's time in looking into that ridiculous petition, you've got another guess coming! It's all in line with your fool notions that you can make a town out of that department-store of yours. Absurd! Utterly absurd! You've a couple of hundred voters in your collection of shacks against sixteen hundred here!" He laughed rancorously and contemptuously. "And you've got the audacity to even dream of moving the county-seat there!"

"It's a dream, all right! And when you come out of yours you'll size up the two, and see which wins."

He strode from the office, sent the petition to the county commissioners and spent the following week riding over the valley; he covering one-half, while Bentler worked the other. At the end of that week they were notified that the commissioners had received the petition and refused to consider it.

Twenty-four hours afterward a notice of a special election to be held at Dahlhurst, to decide on moving the county-seat from Stonycreek to Dahlhurst was printed in the Stonycreek *Herald* and in the Dahlhurst *Gazette*. During the ensuing month the *Gazette* was refulgent with descriptions of Dahlhurst, its present and its future; while the *Herald* editor searched Webster Unabridged for adjectives descriptive of contempt for the "picayune, gopher-burrowed, crumbling ore-bin out on the desert called Dahlhurst, promoted by a junior store-sweeper from Denver who had been

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discharged for his everlasting inefficiency."

Dahl retorted by distributing thousands of handbills through Stonycreek and the valley. There was an excellent cut of a lemon and the sole caption:

WHAT'S COMING TO STONYCREEK ON THE 15TH?

WATCH ME!

The election-day came and with it every voting rancher and helper in the Tehama Valley. The two mines shut down for the day and the employees—mostly voters—swelled the crowd. As there was no hall in the town large enough for the meeting, it was held out on the prairie at the edge of the town.

Many of the men, however, were not confident of the result. There were more voters in Stonycreek than in the whole valley outside; but it was rumored that Dahl had something up his sleeve. And Dahl inspired more confidence than all the official figures of the county-officials.

He was nominated chairman, and one great shout acclaimed the choice. Mounting a ranch-wagon, he opened the meeting:

"MEN of the Tehama Valley! The biggest thing about this meeting is that although many of you do not believe that we can do anything, you have all come in to do what you can. And when ranchmen get together that way there's apt to be some hide-singeing. That's what's going to happen here to-day. This is going to be the most noted round-up the Tehama Valley has ever seen, for the maverick Dahlhurst, is to have its first brand—Diamond C. S. county-seat! How's that?"

The howl that went up was heard by the engineer over at the canyon power-house. Dahl went on:

"The county-seat of Canyon County, gentlemen; and little ole Stonycreek—if it's good—will soon be a suburb of our bright and vigorous little city.

"The commissioners have ignored us, claiming that Stonycreek has twice as many voters as the rest of the county combined. I don't know whether they're lying intentionally or ignorantly; but they're lying! Stonycreek has, to-day, only eight hundred voters against the sixteen hundred they claim! No! Don't laugh at me till I get through.

"I'll put you wise to it, right away. A few weeks ago I got some information that the western boundary-line of our county was wrong; and I engaged the best surveyor I could find to go over that line. He finds that the stakes are a quarter of a mile west of where they ought to be; that the true line runs through the center of Stonycreek, and that means that nearly one-half the population of that frivolous town belongs in Sevier County instead of to Canyon County—our own county. It cuts out six hundred voters from Stonycreek!"

He stopped for five minutes while the mountains echoed back the exuberant cheers, shouts and gun-fire. Then he got started again:

"No dispute on that is possible. When the surveyor finished the line I directed him to report personally to the Sevier county-commissioners. They took the matter up instantly, and although we're all new country about here and pretty crude, there are old records, and they prove that some one, sometime, moved those stakes. Undoubtedly it was the Stonycreek town-authorities. When they found their town growing the wrong way—across the county-line—they moved those stakes back, so as to keep the people in Canyon County and collect their taxes."

He pulled a slip of yellow paper from his pocket and waved it.

"Listen to this telegram delivered to me, to-day:

PHILIP DAHL. DAHLHURST.
Suit entered yesterday in Third District Court to recover all taxes collected by Stonycreek authorities on property west of their county-boundary. Proof absolute.
COMMISSIONERS OF SEVIER COUNTY.

He had another five minutes' rest while the men uncorked some more joy.

"That cuts six hundred voters out of Stonycreek. Then there's two hundred more who work in the smelter, and who are here to-day to vote with us, because in another month they'll be inhabitants of Dahlhurst."

There was a pause, an instant's quiet, and then a rush over to the big group of smeltermen, every one of whom was grasped by the hand and welcomed with picturesque and forcible idioms.

Dahl gave them time and then shouted again:

"Come and hear the rest, boys! That cuts Stonycreek down to eight hundred votes instead of sixteen hundred; while we,

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with you ranchers, miners and smeltermen, have at least ten hundred and fifty votes. What do you say? Shall the county-seat be at Dahlhurst in the future?"

After a few minutes he got a chance to call for a contrary vote, but got none. He sprang from the wagon but was instantly mounted on men's shoulders and paraded.

Then a yell from the wagon again drew them there. Another man had mounted it—Bud Fanning of the Crazy C Ranch.

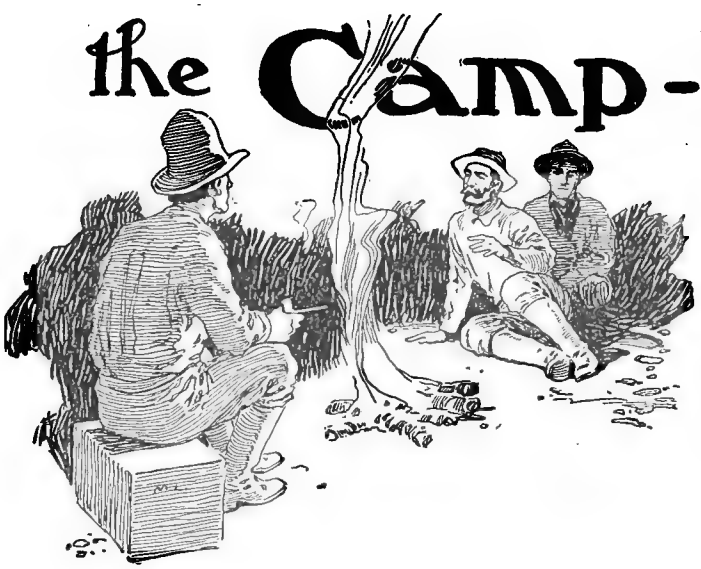
"Boys!" he shouted, "Let's finish the job. There'll be the election for State-senator this Fall an', although it's some early for a caucus, that ain't no reason why we shouldn't hold it now an' here. Perhaps it won't be just legal, but we don't care for that! If it isn't, we'll hold another caucus that is, an' ratify what we do to-day. I nominate Dahl of Dahlhurst for our next senator. Well come now, let's hear about it!"

Most of those men had attended the annual Frontier-Day celebrations at Cheyenne; and they afterward said that Cheyenne had nothing on Dahlhurst when it came to demonstration.

The nomination was immediately ratified. "Watch-Me Dahl" was the choice for State-senator.

"PRETTY smooth work," observed little Mrs. Dahl that evening when she got the first chance of the day to speak alone with her husband. "Pretty smooth work! When you are smiling and properly creased you won't make a very bad picture for the papers. Dolly of Dollyhurst, dealer in lemons and pickles. Likewise an' also, State-senator for the Third District of good little ole Idaho!"

The Camp-Fire



A meeting-place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

C. LANGTON CLARKE, who gives us "Aunt Charlotte's Visit," was born in England in 1858, educated at Westminster School, London, and entered the profession of civil engineering in the offices of the North Eastern Railway. In 1883 he went to Canada, joining first the Grank Trunk Railway, and later the Canadian Pacific Railway. He spent nearly two years on survey and construction of the latter road through the wilderness lying north of Lake Superior, covering 250 miles and experiencing the usual hardships and adventures in that waste land of rock, timber and water, with a tent the only shelter the year around, the snowshoe for transportation in Winter and the birch-bark canoe in Summer.

The law ran laxly in the wilderness in those days, and Mr. Clarke can tell stories of midnight shots in the foreigners' camps, of bodies flung into the nearby lake and never sought after, of threatened lynchings of sub-contractors in arrears to their men, of the ruses of the whisky-peddlers, of forest fires,

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of hunting and trapping expeditions with the Chippewas, of the recklessness of the rock gangs and the men who drove the dog-teams loaded with the deadly nitroglycerin over the rough bush trails. In 1887 Mr. Clarke again joined the Grand Trunk as assistant division engineer, and seven years later abandoned his profession to enter journalism with the *Mail and Empire*, the leading Conservative paper of Ontario.

HERE'S a bit from a letter of Thomas Samson Miller's concerning "The Day of the Soldier" in this issue:

Enclosed is a Niger story, which meant black coffee, cigars and nerves. I think it is the best story of its kind I have written, and I believe the theme—a boy's love for a man in opposition to his puppy love for a girl—is absolutely new to fiction. The background of the story embodies the "Tragedy of the Rear Column" wherein Stanley is supposed to have sacrificed Jameson—left him bottled up while he made his own way out of the country.

Of the Yam Yam natives, who play the big part in the story, the Boyd-Alexander Expedition in 1906 found them confirmed cannibals and very aggressive.

And here a line from a later letter:

"The Tragedy of the Rear Column," was the publication of the letters of Dr. Jameson by his relatives after his death in Africa. Jameson was with Stanley up the Congo and the story goes that Stanley sacrificed him to save his own skin. Anyway, Stanley went into retirement on his Scotch estates after the publication of Jameson's letters and was socially killed.

MEXICO? These two letters present somewhat opposite pictures. In giving me permission to use his letter Mr. Dunn wrote:

Print all or parts, as you see fit, for other Americans are getting worse than I got, almost daily, in Mexico. . . . If I were you, I would urge any of the boys who are thinking of going into Mexico, to count at least half a million before they decide, for, in addition to a large probability of not getting any pay from either side, they will run ninety-nine chances out of a hundred of "disappearing" if caught by any of their enemies.

The omitted part of Mr. Dunn's letter pertains to the unsuccessful efforts of his friends to get aid from the American consulate.

May 14, 1913.

I AM going to tell you a story which may or may not interest you: About a month ago one Cassius Griffith, author of "Cockney-No-Toes," blew into the *Item* office, where I happen to be assistant city editor. Under his arm he bore a copy of the February, 1913, ADVENTURE. In it I discovered a fragment of a letter you had from me regarding the Zapata story, and thereby hangs the tale. Exit Mr. Griffith.

I sold the story ADVENTURE could not use to the *Wide World*, London. It was published in the September issue, and I returned to Mexico in October, both months, of course, of 1912. October 21, I was seized on the street by three Mexican secret-service men of the Madero Government, thrown into the Sixth Comisaria jail, held in a cell 8 x 4 feet filled with slime, manure and vermin, held thirty hours without food, water, a place to lie down, or an opportunity to see the American Government's representatives, and then taken by night to a point outside Mexico City, put on a train with four secret-service men to guard the "*muy peligroso Gringo*," and taken to Laredo, arriving there with one Mexican *centavo*—one-half cent, American money—in my pockets. Meantime friends, though uninformed by Mexican officials, had learned I had been thrown into jail and went to the American consulate. . . . .

I SPENT, as you may imagine, a very interesting four days, until, about noon of October 25, I walked across the bridge at Laredo-Nuevo Laredo, on the Texas-Mexico frontier. There I met one Conway—God bless him, wherever he may roam—who produced in rapid succession a bottle of whisky, breakfast, a cigar, and ten dollars. These things came in exactly the right order, and I might say, without violating any precepts of truth, that all four were badly needed.

I got on the wire, and by three o'clock had money in plenty. I took the four secret-service men, who were personally really very good fellows, to the hotel, where I got the best dinner Laredo could afford, filled them all with booze until they did not know where Mexico lay, and took them to the monument in the middle of the bridge, where they locked arms, locked step, and managed to get to Nuevo Laredo.

OF COURSE, there are a million side-issues to this story—such as the time when the policemen gathered in front of my cell and discussed the manner in which I should be shot on Anzures Plains next day; the way I was searched and stripped naked in the process; how a telegram from the New York *American* ordering photos of Felix Diaz was declared to be "very important" and filed in the archives of the Madero Government; and how a Cabinet meeting was held in Chapultepec Castle to consider my case, and how I very nearly walked right into this meeting. . . . .—Sincerely yours, H. H. DUNN.

The second letter really belongs in the 'Wanted" department but seems more interesting in connection with the letter above:

April 27, 1913.

IT MAY be interesting to the members of the Camp-Fire to learn that the present revolution in Mexico is the closing chapter of the disturbances brought about by the money-power of the United States and much can be said to substantiate that fact, but on account of the turbulent conditions

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Mexico is to-day the best field for investment to the man who can afford to invest a reasonable sum and hold the property until peace has been established. Instances are not rare where, by the expenditure of a thousand or two of dollars, holdings have been acquired this year that could not have been purchased for several hundred thousand dollars three years ago. I myself have taken over several and want a few more if I can get the right kind of partner to back me.

I am a college-bred man and by profession a civil and mining engineer but have preferred the life of adventure to that of an existence in a dusty office, and have only recently returned from an extended trip through the interior of the land of the Montezumas in quest of a mine that was operated during the days of the Cortes, but as its owners were killed by the Indians it became a lost mine until now and was not operated for over a century. It lies there to-day idle, with its treasure-vaults hardly touched, with its dumps brush-overgrown, carrying value that in itself may bring a fortune.

I did not care to denounce it, for at that time the property was and at the present time is overrun by Zapatista forces and any attempt at that time to make a survey of the same for denouncement—if discovered—would have meant the placing of my finger on a property that may be worth millions. In fact two weeks later I was shot through the body by an attacking party near the town of Chilpancingo.

THE revolution of Mexico is, however, near the close. The recent death of President Madero has aroused the antipathetic mind of the average Mexican and many who on former occasions could not be induced to fight are now carrying arms to avenge the death of their ruler and, it being a popular movement by the substantial men of the country, lasting peace must be the result and then Mexico will become the garden-spot of this Northern continent.

I am now open for anything that may bring with it also adventure, and had half decided to travel through Central and South America and in that case would like to hear from parties interested in reports, narratives, and photos of happenings and of scenes along the route of my meanderings.

I am also skilled in the investigations, exposures and settlements of exploitations of a questionable nature in foreign lands for reliable individuals or corporations who may have injudiciously invested money in some get-rich-quick proposition. In this connection I may add, that nearly 75 per cent. of foreign enterprises floated in the United States are either fraudulent or have no commercial value.

IT SOMETIMES happens, however, that if proper investigation is made in a quiet manner the "operators" can be compelled to disgorge some of their ill-gotten money. Not very long ago I successfully made a settlement for the stockholders of a large flotation where nearly a million dollars had been invested and where I recovered for the stockholders nearly 30 per cent., the other amount having been spent by the promoters in a riotous life.

I can talk the language of Mexico and am open for anything that may be mutually advantageous and interesting.

As in all stories covering items from Mexico it is advisable that the writer's name be suppressed and used only for the office files, I beg that, if my story is of interest, I be entitled to the same privilege. It is a well-known fact that in this matter the writer has not near so much cause for fear of the Mexican authorities as of a certain American element who may take exceptions to plain representations of cause and effect and through whose efforts and information such Mexican authorities are induced to work hardship, imprisonment, yes, death, on the man who dares to speak a little too loud. In that land they simply lock you up and either forget all about you or throw away the key.—Very truly yours, No. W. 68.

I HAVE not yet investigated pyrolin, but the following suggestion seems worth careful consideration:

Identification-card just received. I thank you very much for sending the same.

There being a pyrolin factory in town, I intend to have my card covered with transparent sheets of pyrolin. I mention this to you as you may wish to suggest this method of protection to some other reader.

Please notify me when you issue your metal cards.

Very truly yours,
ALBERT B. CHAMBERS.

Many letters of inquiry, probably from new readers of the magazine, show that their writers have not yet seen the explanation of these identification-cards. So I give it again.

AND when you write in for one please observe the very, very simple requirements—give your own name and permanent address (if you have one) *and* the name and permanent address of the person you wish notified. Every day come a bunch of applications failing to give these data. Naturally the card is no good to the bearer or his friends without these data, so we have to write a letter and then the applicant has to write a second letter before the card can be sent to him.

On each card is printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese the following: "In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

Each card bears a serial number. No name appears on it.

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications*

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without the two names and two addresses in full. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

YOU know, probably without my telling, that Augustus Post is a foremost figure in the field of aeronautics. He accompanied Alan R. Hawley in the balloon *St. Louis* in the second international contest for the Gordon-Bennett trophy, winning fifth place by a flight from St. Louis to Baltimore. He was with A. Holland Forbes when the *Conqueror* fell 3,000 feet at Berlin. In "When the Balloon Lands" you will find the account of a still more famous flight of his—an article of peculiar interest coming from one who knows the inside of things.

WE'VE had tales of the Silver Creese before from Donald Francis McGrew, and now, with "The Silver Creese at Bongo-Bongo," we may as well have his account of the Creese legends as he collected them here and there in the Philippines. His opening reference is to old Dato Qudrat in "The Wail of the Pogaree" which we published some time ago.

In the true version of the tale, the boy was hanged at Iligan. And old Qudrat never regained his sanity. His madness took the form of brooding over the loss of his boy, and he spent days at a time in brooding over plans of vengeance against the Deity he had heretofore bowed to, but whom he held had cursed and reviled him and robbed him of a son who was all in all to him.

His madness did not keep him from raiding at opportune times, however; and the sinking of the *Don Alfonso*, a Spanish transport, was one of his acts. There were several bars of silver aboard, and some wealthy Spanish passengers, whom he robbed —and did other things to—and with these bars and the diamonds in hand, old Qudrat evolved his plan of the Silver Creese. The handle was made of finest ebony, the blade of silver, the scroll-work studded with jewels. And with this unique weapon in hand, old Qudrat mounted Mt. Holy, just off Marahuí butte (where Camp Keithley now sits) and thought to come to close quarters with Allah on the heights..

OF COURSE, he never came back. No Moro would mount the peak; but when the story got round, there came an Englishman who made it and found Qudrat's bones, as well as the Creese. He made it back to Iligan in three days through the Lenamon valley, which is marching some if you know that valley; but at Iligan he got into a drunken game with a Spanish officer who shot him in the row.

Discovering the Creese, the officer decided to desert, and did so with a mestizo woman, expecting to make Borneo in a *banca* and from there to pick up a steamer and get away. But the woman knifed him. She in turn was picked up by a Swede tramp in a storm after she had turned back toward Luzon; and when the Captain found out what she had, he fostered designs on the thing himself.

The mate came into the story then; discovering it, he started a mutiny which ended in a storm in Mindoro straits, where the story has it that the Captain drove the boat on the reefs in desperation. I have seen the ribs of the old hulk myself. Some of the crew—it is not known who—got away in a long boat, with the Creese—and there the true versions of the Creese end as far as I am able to vouch for.

THE fact is, I can not truthfully say that I can vouch for *any* of the tales, in so far that I never saw the Creese myself; but the priest told me that much of it, he having been in Iligan during the fight back of the town and during the ensuing incidents of the Creese. He told me the Pogaree story, and as much of the Creese tale as I have related; and he appealed to me as a truthful man.

Of course, since its disappearance off the tramp, many tales have been told about the Creese. Its real worth is unknown; but it was, or is, probably worth a high figure. Before it left Mt. Holy, no Mohammedan would go after it; but as soon as it left there their religious scruples underwent a sort of chemical change, you might say, so that they sought it with a fervor in which avarice no doubt played a strong part. Some men scoff at the tale, as twentieth century men do these days at treasure-ships and the like; but I was curious, and, though I took the priest's word, I of course could not resist the temptaion to ask about it elsewhere.

A SALOON-KEEPER at Iligan, whom I have called Frisco Jack in my stories, corroborated the priest's tale, saying he had heard it from several ships' captains; a man, a sailor, in Chefu, told me he had talked with a man who had seen it; another at Honolulu, a clerk with the wanderlust, told me the story as well. When he got a few more drinks in him he became very confidential, and told me he had *seen* the Creese himself. But I took his version with a grain of salt, though it was a rattling good story. And then there was the Captain of the *Norken*, whom I had the pleasure of meeting off Guam. He was neither drunk nor superstitious, but a hard-bitten Yankee captain in charge of a Norwegian tramp over a mixed crew. He said he had heard only scraps of its origin; that he didn't care about it. But he knew it existed, from what his mate had told him when he sailed the *Countess*. The mate had fought for it, and died in the Captain's arms. His story I shall tell some day.

BEST of all comes this story I am enclosing. Best of all because it was told me by my bunkie, the Brashares of the story. He was in another regiment when this happened; I was not on the detachment. His story as he told it to me I have tried to

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put down here. When pressed he appeared somewhat troubled about the Creese; he will not come out flat-footed and say he believes in the Creese or its origin. But what he saw and heard he told me as you have it before you.

NOW and then, as you know, one of our writers rises in his place at the Camp-Fire and properly introduces himself to the rest of us. Most of them need urging before they will speak at length about themselves, but generally they yield to the call of good-fellowship and give us the tale of their own wanderings. It is good hearing. Makes their stories in the magazine all the better reading to know the real man behind them and how he happens to be familiar with the things he writes about. At least it does with me.

This month it is Gordon McCreagh, whose "Brass Idol" appears in this issue.

BEFORE I took a hand at writing, and when I was "out there" in the middle of things, I used to say that I had never had an adventure, but I have since learned that the numerous little incidents which are a matter of one's daily life in the "back of beyond" are really honest-to-God adventures, and that they only need a certain technical skill to turn into stories.

Hitherto all the stories I have submitted to you have been based on incidents that have happened to myself, or that have come under my personal notice. The character "Snake O'Shane" which I have tried to build, or rather the *name*, for I lay no claim to being the heroic character I have tried to set down, is taken from my own nickname with the idea that some of the copies of ADVENTURE which drift East of Suez may come into the hands of the many people who either knew me personally or had heard of me, and might raise a smile, or in some cases a curse, of reminiscence.

I have read over all the Camp-Fire talks to get a line on the kind of thing you might use, from noting what the other fellows have done; and right here I am faced with a difficulty. On reviewing my past life it comes on me with something of a shock to find that I don't seem to have *done* anything; but many unpleasant things have happened to me from time to time, and it seems that a short account of them would best suit the present purpose.

Eh, bien, here goes!

WHEN I was very, very young and correspondingly foolish, at about seventeen, to be accurate, "Art" claimed me. I went to Paris to *study*, and spent a glorious life of *play*, with no money, no respectability, and no responsibilities for about a year, till I got mixed up in a saber duel—as a second, not by any means as a principal. One of the participants decided to die, and as I had long since discovered that there were very much better men than myself starving at the art game, with no prospects of ever doing anything else, I, for my part, decided to leave Paris in a hurry.

I arrived first in Hanover, and later in Göttingen to continue my studies, but fate somehow led me again into the company of certain *Chor Studenten* and my studies suffered consequently. Beyond learning something of the *Mensur Schläger* I acquired nothing.

By about this time my head was being filled with fool ideas of the glamour of the East, where one goes to shake the pagoda tree and catch the rupees that fall off. The rupee myth in conjunction with current fables of Oriental occultism, a matter in which I was interested, decided me to ship myself "Somewheres East of Suez, where the best is like the worst."

THAT was eight years ago. I started on a Friday *and* the thirteenth, and I've kicked myself several times a day ever since.

I fixed up "a splendid appointment" by correspondence with an old robber in a shipping business in Calcutta. My whole worldly fortune was spent in buying the cheapest passage I could find, and in due course I arrived to take up my splendid appointment. The job was all right, but there was one disadvantage attached to it. There was no pay. A stranger in a strange land, I stuck to it for eight months, always hoping for pay; but it never came in spite of glib promises of "seeing what could be done next month."

I might have stuck it out for longer but for an unpleasant occurrence. I had taken a string of lighters to an up-river station in tow of a steam launch. On arrival, the launch returned about her business, and when unloading was completed I returned by the usual way, drifting down stream on one of the lighters with its crew of ten men. One morning I awoke to find myself in the company of a crew of corpses. The bubonic plague was indulging in one of its special efforts at the time, and four of the men had managed to get it and die during the night. The rest of the crew of wily Hindus had quietly slipped overboard and swum ashore without telling me a word about it, for fear I should make them stay and work the barge.

Well, if I had continued as far as Calcutta with the boat I should have been quarantined for God knows how many years, so I "tied up" and entered the city quietly by train. The Robber was more exercised about his old kedge than about the quarantine matter, and he raised such a racket that the port authorities became unpleasantly officious about me; so the fates ordered that I should "softly and suddenly vanish away" like the immortal hunter of the Snark.

I have perhaps dwelt too largely on this episode, but it was the first, and it made a deep impression on me. My only happy recollection of that period is that I once managed to borrow five rupees off the Robber, and that he soon after died of cholera, his wife of appendicitis, and that his son was pursued for bigamy. *Kismet! Allah ho akbar.*

I DRIFTED up to the tea district of Darjeeling next, and became a planter's assistant; but coolie-driving became monotonous after a short time, and having learned something about the use of a rifle, I went into the free Himalayan state of Nepal after big game. I shot considerable, but missed a great deal more, and there was consequently no money in it; so I went over the Jalap La pass into Tibet after turquoises.

I was doing fairly well when the British agent at Chumbi had me arrested for thoughtlessly selling a

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gun to the Theshi Lama. They called it gun-running; they had all sorts of fool agreements fixed up after the so-called "Mission" of 1904 under Colonel Younghusband, when several thousand Tibetans armed with prehistoric *bamboo*-wire-bound cannon and iron swords were shot down, though the despatches made it a few hundred. Well, there was a deal of cumbrous correspondence and miles of red tape, during the course of which I learned that I had no right to go into Tibet at all without first obtaining permission from the British authorities in India. And Tibet was a free country, mind you.

The British Government in India gave me a pain, so I worked my way to Borneo, where I collected for Jamrack's Menagerie, in Liverpool, England. I believe I captured the biggest orang-outang that ever reached England alive, and some of the biggest pythons (Python Molurus), though I grieve to think that they were seldom more than half as long as Mr. Algot Lange's fifty-footers.

From Borneo I drifted to Burma, as I had heard that that was the finest and most unexplored game-country in Asia. And it certainly was. I still collected big game, and incidentally took in orchids, rubber, ivory, and malaria—of the last the most.

I took a trip into the Wa country after jade stone, with a companion, but the fierce little head-hunters discovered us, and we had to get out faster than we came, with the loss of all the jade we had found. The only profit from the venture was a head with the bones taken out in some wonderful manner and shriveled to the size of an orange, which we sold to an agent of the British Museum. I worked this trip into the first story I tried to put over on you, but somehow you failed to recognize its genius.

LATER I got a job with the Government Keddah Department, that is the department which holds the Government monopoly of catching wild elephants. This was too strenuous for a man of peace, and I quit, particularly because I foresaw that big trouble was coming on account of cooked-up accounts. For instance, the bosses, two of them, though they were highly paid English Government officials, were making their fortune out of it. They had a way of selling elephants to private parties for big money and then writing them off as "died of anthrax."

My guardian angel intervened in my behalf and showed me a hint of what was coming, and as I didn't want to be mixed up in it (none of the graft came my way to induce me to stay), I left. The smash came very soon after; there was a big Government inquiry, and both men were locked up, and the Department was disorganized for a time, so I would have lost my job anyway. This was the one stroke of good fortune which ever came my way.

I next put in some months at the Mogok ruby mines, where all the best stones come from. Luck came my way once and I found a fine stone, probably worth a few thousand dollars, though it may have turned out to be considerably less when the stone came to be examined and cut. It never reached that state with me. "A fool there was," and it was *me*. I went hollering through the camp, "Come and see what I got!" And that evening in a lonely spot a voice broke on my ears, "Hand over that stone, young man!" Something seemed to glimmer shiny-blue in the dark, so I handed. This has always been regarded as a very cowardly action on my part by various young men who lived in the large cities of Rangoon and Calcutta and were resplendent in high collars and silk shirts. They said I should have grappled with him, or tripped him up, or struck his hand aside and seized him by the throat, or even that he would surely have missed in the dark. However, I am a man of peace; I gave him the stone without a murmur. We got up a posse and chased him, but he got clear away. *Sacré—donnerwetter—perro—dog!*

FROM the mines I went east to Siam, working for a lumber company, in the teak forests, with elephants. I got fired for riding one of the elephants out on a tiger-hunt. The elephant got clawed up a whole lot, and in my terror I missed both barrels, and in due course got fired.

I then drifted farther east to the China ports and Japan, trading in silk; but the Celestials, and especially the Japs, had it on me all the time and cheated me all along. They were too clever for me and so I went back to Burma with Clyde Allen Dickinson, a Chicago man who has left his name printed big all over Burma. We ran a moving-picture concern, aiming to get the distant places on the frontier where the untraveled aborigines had never seen a white man.

We did pretty well till one day, crossing a ford, one of our mules loaded with all our reels got swept away and scattered several thousand feet of perfectly good film along some two miles of the river-bed. As we had to buy every foot of film we used —no convenient film-exchanges there—it broke us. We managed to borrow a little money for a new start, and determined to hit the capital of the Shan States for the great gong-festival when the whole district collects in the town. Well, we arrived and set up a big mat enclosure on the aerodrome principle. Just an enclosure, no seats; the people came and sat on the floor.

Well, anybody could get in under the mats, so we had to arrange to have a patrol. We hired the hardest case in the town, a renegade Chinaman with one ear, by the name of How Son, and left it to him to collect three friends and among them patrol the four sides of our enclosure. We patted ourselves on the back and thought we were doing fine, but Fate was out against us.

It happened that one of the big chiefs was one of the most miserly dogs in the world, and to save his eight cents he tried to crawl under. The zealous patrol hauled him out by the heels and in the altercation which followed they calmly cut his throat and then made tracks for the border. It seems no one missed the old geezer for several hours, and it was not till about four in the morning that his folks found him in a dry watercourse. Of course, we were blamed, as our hired help had done it, and the whole universe collected outside our tent, thirsting for our blood. It looked very unwholesome for us for a while, but eventually we managed to compromise by paying, as blood money, every cent we had taken.

ONE of our troubles was the light; we carried an ether-saturator and a tank for generating oxygen by the manganese dioxide method. This is never satisfactory at the best of times, and we often found the light quietly dying away. At such times the Shans and Kachins had a pleasant way

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of throwing knives up at the place where the light came from, *i. e.*, the machine. It grew so unhealthy for the operator that we had to have an operating-box made out of boiler plate, which added another hundred pounds or so to the weight we had to carry—a serious consideration.

We were stranded too often at this job, so we gave it up, and I again sought service under the Indian Government, in charge of the Post-Office printing. I knew nothing about printing, but then neither did anybody else, and I was ahead of the rest by reason of having once taken a correspondence course in advertising, out of which I had acquired a few names of different types and sundry other technical expressions. It was sufficient to make a good bluff on, and I made good money till I got mixed up with a temple dancing-girl—let it be understood, on a strictly business basis.

She had managed to run away from the temple and was anxious to come to America to go on the vaudeville stage. This thing appealed to me, as I had wanted to see America for a long time. We arranged to come, together with a troupe of Hindu musicians. Our preparations were somewhat hastened by the Hindu priests, who trailed the lady and burgled her apartment in search of certain documents, and also arranged to have me poisoned. They sent a man to slip arsenic into my food, an easy matter in an Indian bungalow. Fortunately the man was an amateur at the business, and he put in too much, with the result that the irritant worked almost immediately, and I vomited before it could take serious effect. I lived, but I was awfully sick for some days.

Well, we hurried away, and eventually got bookings in New York as the "Princess —— ——" act (the lady was really of royal blood), of which you may have heard. It didn't catch on very well, however, and the company disbanded.

WELL, I guess that's all. We had some trifling trouble with the Hindu priests' influence, even here in New York, but beyond being unpleasant it is not interesting.

The sum total of my life is that I have rolled and have gathered not a particle of moss, alas! However, my ambition has been fulfilled. I am in New York, and though not yet a citizen, I proclaim it to be the greatest city in the world, and I don't mind how long I stay here—though at the present moment I am trying to connect with an expedition to Southern Asia. But this would be too great a piece of good fortune, I fear. I am not counting on it any.

You will curse me for taking up so much of your time. *Eh, bien,* if it is written—*Kismet!* It is the will of Allah.

TO-DAY I examined one of the applications to be signed by those wishing to join an expedition formerly announced in our "Wanted" department. In it was a clause that said it was "under the auspices of ADVENTURE." I take the first opportunity to explain that it is not. Nor backed by us. Nor connected with this magazine or company in any way beyond the obvious fact that we made room for a notice of it along with all the other items in the department. Neither is any other expedition. If one does go out under our auspices it will be duly announced in the magazine.

This does not mean that we consider the above expedition "crooked." We know nothing about that one way or the other, except that the New York bank given as reference reports that the promoter has a satisfactory account with them and that they believe him to be honest and reliable.

But we expressly state at the head of the "Wanted" column that we do not vouch for any of the men or opportunities offered in it beyond the fact that the letters are received and published in good faith. If in certain cases we do a little investigating on our own account, that is merely an additional and voluntary service to our readers, not one to which we are in any way bound. We merely print the "ads"; it is you who must decide whether they are worth while.

AT THE August Camp-Fire we had a letter reporting the death of one of our fellow-members, Captain L. Bushnell, at Cananea, Mexico, a second letter saying he was only dangerously wounded, and a letter from Captain Bushnell himelf, written just before the battle at which he was reported killed.

Well, shortly after these letters went into type, into the office walked Captain Bushnell himself. He had been badly wounded at Cananea—shot diagonally through the body—but was well on the way to recovery. He had been in charge of a machine-gun and some Yaquis and Mexicans for the Constitutionalists, and had kept his gun going an hour or two from a position as advantageous as it was dangerous. Finally he went down under a bullet from one of the Federal machine-guns he had been keeping pretty well out of action.

YOU remember E. A. Morphy's stories. Also, he was one of the contributors to our little symposium on what really happened at the storming of Dargai. It seems we did violence to the spelling of two proper names in his letter and fell from grace in other ways. I'll let him speak first:

Oh, Mr. Hoffman! What have I been at? Me, what parades hisself as a critic of Chroniclers of the Tirah! Ghagis!!!—Chaps what's gagged??? Takkas!!!—Ducks what eats tacks??? Hast never heard, fair shepherd, of the gentle Ghazi—he that

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browseth on blood, and slays Giaours (see Byron *et al.*) for the glory of God and the ease of his own spirit immortal?

And the tack-eating Takkas of Holy Writ! What of those fiercest of all the fell Afridis, the Zakkas of the bleak Tirah? Zakkas with a 'zi' so please you.

Do you remember the yarn of the wild and woolly Western editor whose enemy came like a thief in the night and stole all the 'e's' out of his composing-room cases? Do you recall how he surmounted the hideous difficulty, and fulminated against his foe in his next issue:

If svsr ws managş to gst a bss lins on ths scoundrsl —if svsr ws sss, if svsr ws clap syss on him bswars of the vsngsancs of ons who——" etc.

Who stole the z's from your rotten old composing case?

AND then, my poor little sawed-off but brave and decimated friends the 1st 2nd Gurkhas? What have they done to ADVENTURE that their glory should be dimmed and diluted and scattered over many regiments, when the gore they shed was their own gore only—the gore of the Gurkhas of Sirmoor?

We Hyper-Critics, as George Bernard Shaw would describe us, can't be too blinking particular about what we say and how we say it. And Heaven forbid that I should ever have pretended that the 1st Gurkhas should have helped the 2nd Gurkhas at Dargai. My point was that one Gurkha regiment fought as desperately as, and lost more men than, any Scots unit in the show.

The 1st 2nd Gurkhas—that is to say, the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Gurkha Rifles, otherwise King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles, otherwise (and originally) the Sirmoor Rifles—had 67 officers and men more or less flattened out under the bluff at Dargai, while they were fanning the rocks so as to cool the way for the Gordons. The Gordons had 44 casualties, all told—50 per cent. less than the Gurkhas—but they were given all the glory.

You "done me in the eye, cruel and horrid," by diffusing those casualties over two regiments—the First AND Second Gurkhas.

Therefore and accordingly, should your friend Townend, or Foran, or Talbot Mundy, or any other who understands—or thinks he understands—the niceties of these matters, tell him, I pray thee, that this person ("Civvy" though he be) was not talking through his hat. Blame the error on the comps. or the proofreader.

ONE other prayer, and this, my wail, is ended. Next time—if ever again from this font of wisdom you glean aught that is calculated to elevate the moral tone of ADVENTURE, will you, of your charity, eliminate those more florid adornments of my epistolary style that lose their grace and symmetry when translated into misere dashes?

There are occasions when the personal note sounds ill when voiced through the passionless throat of the linotype. Please substitute for my simpler "hells" and other references to damnation, fair words that will suggest more of the salon and less of the tented field, and thus endow me with a bright if meretricious halo of culture that will endear me to the gentler readers of ADVENTURE.

Heigho! Forgive the grouse! It serves me damned well right for not using a typewriter, I suppose!

Very truly yours, E. A. MORPHY.

SURE, I and the rest of us here in the office make mistakes. Always will. There aren't any omniscient editors—just plain human, despite rumors that we're not even that. And ADVENTURE's field is a particularly hard one not to slip up in.

For example, I was called down the other day because one of our fiction stories spoke of a certain British regiment as having once been stationed at some town in India, whereas that regiment never had been stationed in that town, because it was a cavalry regiment, and cavalry is never, never stationed in that town. Not being an Englishman, never having been in India, and not having made a life-study of the English army, I didn't know that.

Was also called down twice because a man in one of our fiction stories used the wrong star in taking an observation. The author of the story had spent several years of his life at sea, but he isn't a navigator. Neither am I.

EVERY call-down that has come in has been a kindly one. And gratefully received. A magazine like this needs the cooperation of readers with writers and editors to keep it reliable in its big and varied field. Tell us every time we make a slip. We'll try not to make the same one twice.

To hold this job down right, I *ought* to be a navigator. Also a professor of foreign languages. Also a Forty-Niner. Also a Veteran of the Spanish and Civil Wars, with service in the Philippines; president of the International Ethnographical Survey, whether there is any such thing or not; an experienced lost-treasure seeker; a chemist; Mr. Pinkerton; an ex-British soldier with service medals running back at least as far as the Crimean War; an Afghan by birth, a Matabele by education and a Mexican peon by attainment. Incidentally I ought to be 227 years old and still in the heyday of youth. As a matter of fact, I'm just plain human—very plain and very human. I'll often need your help and I'll always be grateful for it. After all, it's your magazine, not mine.

But to come back to my friend E. A. Morphy. I've never met any Ghazis or Zakkas. Neither has the Standard Dictionary. Nor the Century. Nor Webster's. Nor our atlas. Mr. Morphy himself lives in England. He generally knows what he is talking about. It seemed, then, a case of

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reading his handwriting correctly. That came under the head of adventure, so I took a chance. Here is what I took a chance on, same being a reproduction from the two words as he wrote them with his own hand. At least I suppose it was his hand. I leave that and the original question to you.

As to the 1st—2nd Gurkhas, that one is on me, for I knew the English system of two separated battalions to a regiment and ought to have made a better guess here.

Now for Mr. Morphy's wail over dashes instead of cuss-words. We use the former because we have to draw the line *some*where, and, all things considered, it seems easiest to draw it right at the start. It grieves Mr. Lewis and me sometimes, but luckily there's no 2-em dash rule for the office. And one time I thought I was going to lose my friend H. D. Couzens because I'd used a dash for a word one of the people in his stories had remarked on the occasion of his being shot. Mr. Couzens called my attention to the fact that naturally the gentleman in question would want to say something, that naturally it would be a cuss-word, and that, as the bullet had got him in the stomach, his diaphragm was not working well and the *only* one of all the cuss-words he could negotiate at all would be this particular hard-breathed and gasped one. Mr. Couzens had seen a gentleman shot in just that place, had heard him use just that word, regarded it—very rightly—as a good bit of realistic color in his story and grieved accordingly over its omission. Mr. Lewis and I grieved with him.

BACK to Mr. Morphy again. The kings of old used to grant special honors to favored ones among their subjects—say the hereditary privilege of wearing a hat in the presence of the monarch. Well, I took it on myself to send him, in your behalf and mine, a formal grant giving to him and his descendants in perpetuity the unique, special and particular right to use real cuss-words instead of 2-em dashes in the "Camp-Fire." Subject, of course, to your majority veto, but, failing to receive such veto within three weeks of publication of this notice, the privilege will be considered as indelibly bestowed upon our esteemed friend and comrade, E. A. Morphy, descendants included.

TO-DAY I had occasion to write to fourteen of our authors who had stories in last month's issue. I chanced to notice the various addresses when I came to sign the letters and I found them a good index to the character of the magazine. Two of these men are in Honolulu, one of them sent by a newspaper in anticipation of serious trouble with Japan. One address had to be changed from Winnipeg, Canada, to Kingston, Jamaica, to overtake a wanderer. Another changed from San Francisco to Egypt. Another was left Los Angeles, because that man had just written that he had ceased to have an address, being about to take a ship of some kind at a not yet fixed date for a destination unknown and immaterial to himself beyond a sort of preference for the South Seas or maybe the Orient.

The remainder were to Washington, D. C., a town in New Jersey, Seattle, New York, Petoskey, Mich., Long Island, Provincetown, Mass. But most of the men addressed do not stand for these places. Behind one lie Africa, India, Europe and Australia; behind another South America chiefly, with the rest of the world thrown in for good measure; behind another the North of Africa is most prominent among many places; behind this one Turkey and the Balkans; here British East Africa and India again; here the Seven Seas and all parts of the world save one; here our own West, and so on.

OF THE 18, 11 are Americans, one of these born in India; 1 Australian; 3 Englishmen, living in this country; 1 Englishman in England; 2 Irishmen living in this country.

Twelve of them I know to be, or to have been, adventurers themselves. Two I know not to be, unless you count the adventures that fall to a newspaperman's lot. Another has had that much, perhaps more. I do not know. The three others I do not know about one way or the other.

Other issues of the magazine would doubtless yield a still more scrambled geographical omelet. It merely happened to strike me in connection with the September number, and seemed interesting enough to pass on.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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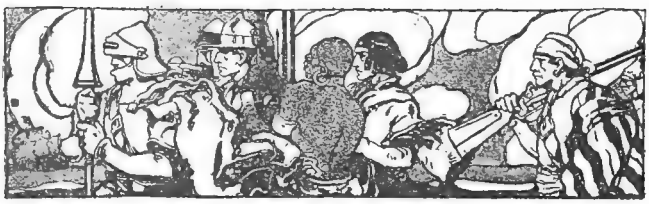

WANTED —MEN *and* ADVENTURES

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to such of our readers as may care to avail themselves of it. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or part of a letter. Any inquiry for adventures or adventurers sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor.

I AM 21 years old, 6 feet tall, and weigh 190. Have run a transit in Colorado, been foreman on a construction gang on an irrigation project in the same State, a farmer, fired on a mountain railroad, and for the past year a salesman. Good rifle shot and have camped and hunted over half of Colorado. Good education and am of Scotch-Irish descent. Looking for something needing a little red blood. Don't care particularly where I go. —Address No. W 83.

WISH to join an expedition in search of lost treasure or for prospecting, a revolution—preferably in the Latin American countries, or the French Foreign Legion. Am 21, height 6 feet, weight 164 pounds, good physical condition except that I lost my hearing about five years ago. Can read the lips to a slight extent. Can't put any money into an expedition and yet want to get into something that has a chance of my making some money. Am ready to take my chances on anything that fulfils these requirements.—Address No. W 86.

WANT to get in touch with a young man about 21 to 25 years old. German-American preferred and about 5 ft. 5 to 5 ft. 10, who knows something about moving pictures and display of views, as I intend to fit out a wagon to cross the continent. Have one party with me. It is to be made self-supporting and with returns, or a paying trip besides the experiences. Will hunt when we can. Take photos of interesting places and reproduce them larger. Also various other things that will pay a good return while on the trip.—Address No. W 96.

HAVE traveled all over the world from 60 degrees South Lat. to 50 degrees North Lat. and taken in all ports and places near the water. Started out at 13 years. Served at 14 under British Government on Nile expedition; after that went to sea again; served as a gunner on Brazilian Warship *Aquidaban* during revolution under Admiral Mello; during China-Japan War was laying mines in Chinese harbors. After that in Chinese custom-house service. Next instructor in seamanship to cadets at Annapolis Academy under Lieut. Benson. In several expeditions along the Central American coasts. Served 4 years in U. S. Navy as petty officer with Admiral Dewey at Manila Bay and all engagements also up in North China during Boxer trouble. Held rank as lieutenant and commander in two small navies; also an officer in U. S. army transports. Later a special agent for a foreign Government: I know where all the principal forts are in the world; have boarded all the largest warships in the world. Hold a master's license for ocean steamers, U. S. Am 42 years of age, quick and active. Looking for employment where there is some life. Will give advice to any one on places where I have been.—Address No. W 96.

AM 5 feet 5; 155 lbs.; robust and good health; 30 years old; common school education and good shot with any fire-arms. I've held a number of jobs as camp laborer, timekeeper, four-horse-skinner, chuck-tender and cook; also overseer of plantation for 3 years. At present I am braking on railroad. Open for anything, anywhere and anytime where there is something doing.—Address No. W 91.

AUSTRALIAN wants employment. Willing to go anywhere. Prospected in West Australia from Hannans to Hall's Creek—through the Territory into Queensland—New Guinea. Served through the Boer War with Imperial Bushmen. Drove cattle from the Gulf Country into N. S. W. Worked in the stoke-hole on ocean liners. Electrician (Mains Superintendent for four years). A good shot. Can ride, swim and keep a closed mouth.—Address No. W 92.

WANT some member of the "Camp-Fire" who is willing to listen to a good proposition. Some one who has knocked about a bit and will stick.—Address No. W 107.

RIPE to go with any old expedition any old place on the planet. Am a doctor graduate Bennett, Md., College, class '07; externe work Cork County Hospital; interne surgical work Shoemaker Hospital, Lincoln, Nebr., 14 months. Chair of Physical Diagnosis, Neb. College of Medicine, one Winter while at home. Am 6 ft. 1; 175 lbs. Perfect health. Have been all over U. S., Mexico and parts of Canada; also in Cape Colony during Boer War and thence to the Cape Verdes and U. K. waters.

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Speak colloquial Spanish, or rather the Mexican idiom, fluently. Worked as telegrapher; understand wireless, but only the Morse code. Seven months as electrical engineer, Junction City, Kans. Also experience as repair and automobile machinist over west. At present in a musical comedy, having been a professional vaudeville pianist for many years, "when the sledding was bad."—Address DR. C. J. ROGERS, 1010 S. 11th Street, Lincoln, Nebr.

ENLISTED in U. S. Army at age of 15; served 3 years in Philippines. Honorably discharged; re-enlisted and went to Philippines for second time at age of 17; saw much active service. Can handle rifle, revolver and field-gun, and can ride a horse. Speak Spanish a little. Am 29 years old; 195 lbs. Have been employed as special agent for railroad; at present special policeman in an amusement park, but I find this job rather tame. Poor but honest and will stick to anything I start at. Want to join an expedition of some kind, or will take job that requires confidential man. Have been in 38 States and 5 foreign countries. All offers must be remunerative. Will go to any part of the world.—Address J. TOMSEN, 2906 Arsenal Street, St. Louis, Mo.

PARTY wanted to finance exploring expedition into the Libyan Desert of N. E. Africa. Probably from $15,000 to $20,000 necessary. No uninured person need write. Strictly business.—Address J. H. FRYER, 1042 Spring Garden Street, Allentown, Pa.

ANY of your readers willing to go with me about the first of the year in search of the place known as "El Gran Tinaja," a rich placer gold-mine in the Peten country of northern Guatemala? Have concise data on the location and am confident that I will at least get within striking distance of the Lacandon Indians' secret source of gold. It will be no picnic, as the Guatemalan and Yucatan Governments have not succeeded in pacifying the Lacandons or Mayas as yet. I would like two fellows who are not particular as to how much quinine they may consume.—Address C. C. NICKUM, 2922 Dean Ave., Spokane, Wash.

AM 22, red headed and Scotch-Irish. Have been all over the U. S. Fair shot; hold marksman's medal with militia. Will go anywhere in search of adventure and *money*. My capital is youth, nerve and $500. Have college education, also some things not taught in school. Can drive a car, also am a rodman or chainman. Any one wishing my services or wishing to go in partnership write at once, stating plainly character, etc., of work or partnership. Will take a long chance if you will pay for it.—Address J. W. R., Box 15, Austin, Tex.

SHOULD like to get in touch with some party having an adventurous proposition on foot which held promise of getting out of the beaten tracks and of yielding a profit legitimately. Am 29, 5 ft. 11, 190 lbs.; a graduate of one of our largest Eastern universities, working my way through the four year course without financial assistance. One enlistment U. S. Army; traveled the U. S. and Canada from coast to coast, with yacht and automobile racing as side issues. Am a good swimmer, oarsman, sailor, and handy with rifle, revolver and shot-gun. Don't know what "nerves" are. Have the necessary personality to "pass muster" from the "Court of St. James to the South Sea Islands." Languages spoken; English, Spanish, French, and can read Italian. No matter what the risk, I will consider any venture that is "above board," but have no money to invest.—Address No. W 111.

YACHTSMAN, active, good shot, cook, swimmer, 27 years of age, 15 years' experience playing with small boats and yachts along the Atlantic Coast. And now I would put my experience to practical use. There is good, clean, healthy, adventure to be had at this king of sports. I am open for a proposition from some one owning the proper craft. Adventure is my middle name, and I have a leaning toward the deep-blue.—Address No. W 89.

AM PLANNING a trip to South Africa from Chicago and wish a young man that can rough it. Will walk or ride to New Orleans, then work our way across to Capetown by boat. I am 29, and made a similar trip in 1901 to South Africa, West Indies, Canary and Cape Verde Islands, Wales, England, and back to Canada. At the present a theatrical performer and have shown in Cuba and all the best theatres in New York, Chicago and other cities of the U. S. Am a lover of nature and my business is too confining. Photographer, pen artist, scenic artist, piano-player and acrobat and can always find way to pay my end of trip. Want to collect insects also on trip (I mean for exhibition and scientific study and not the kind sometimes collected accidentally on such trips) Want a good pal with a profession or trade and not a drunkard, and one that will stick by me through thick and thin and work at anything. Will visit Mayor and Chief of Police for autographs in each city; also leading papers. Good shot. Speak some Spanish and German.—Address No. W 93.

I'M A young man, 23, and have done considerable knocking around the U. S. Open for anything offering adventure or change of scene, with pecuniary remuneration a second consideration. Have had considerable photographic experience and at present own a 4 x 5 revolving-back, long-focus Graflex with complete lens-equipment and know how to use it. Also have in mind taking a trip through South America this Winter, working my way, and would like to get in touch with a live young fellow to whom this kind of a trip appeals.—Address No. W 98.

WANTED, adventure. Qualifications: health, good walker, fair shot and rider. Would like a job with some snap in it. Will go any place.—Address No. W 97.

AM 22; 5 ft. 7; 170 lbs. Can run automobile, motorboat, motorcycle; would like to try aeroplane. Good mechanic, printer, telephone operator, etc. Would like to get in an adventure, any part of the world. Pretty fair shot with rifle or pistol, automatic preferred. Would like something that would pay well in the end whether risk is great or small. I prefer to be on water.—Address No. W 94.

HOW many men in the United States would like to take part in the greatest adventure of history? Applicants must be able-bodied without any history of entanglement with shady adventures. They

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must meet at some point which will be designated to them. Each man must be provided with at least $50 in gold and all must be willing to obey orders and ask no questions. No man will be asked to violate any law of the United States or to do any dishonorable thing. The service contemplated is dangerous, but not desperate. The possible rewards are fabulous. All communications will be considered confidential.—Address No. W 100.

AM 19 years old, 5 ft. 4, graduate business college; can operate typewriter, handle a gun, understand a little bit about wireless, fair photographer, been all through the eastern U. S. Worked as bookkeeper, timekeeper, yard clerk, salesman, etc. Want to go to Central or South America or anywhere. Haven't any money but want to hook up with a good pardner for any kind of adventure.—Address No. W 102.

YOUNG man wishes to go with exploring or surveying expedition anywhere, at any time, just so there's a chance for making some money and adventure. Can speak Austrian or Slavish.—Address Box 6, Steelton, Pa.

WOULD like adventure of any kind promising excitement and having a fair prospect of money in the end. Unable to furnish capital. Fair shot with rifle, can fence, wrestle a little, have been in forestry service, and have slight knowledge of first-aid work. In fine health, afraid of nothing. Carried highest honors in free-hand drawing at drawing-school.—Address No. W 106.

SCOTCH, 24 years old, strict teetotaler, good health. Want to join a party going on some adventure and looking for a young man as a companion. No experience but willing to take a hand at anything. In this country 4 years; worked in a hardware store and at boilermaking; now a carpenter.—Address ANDREW C. FERGUSSON, 10,708 Hampden Av., Cleveland, O.

HAVE decided to settle down and quit the road and cease to give ear to the promptings of the wanderlust. Have been all kinds of a soldier of fortune and could write several good stories, only the recollections would stir that old wanderlust into life.

Could not decide about settling anywhere on account of the slow ways of the old settlers where I would like to live, but now I have found an ideal place, in this county, which is unorganized, and which I intend to fill up with the required 150 voters which the law demands, and then we can have a country just like we want it. And this is not intended to try to sell my old pals some land at all. The State of Texas has quite a lot of good vacant land here and sells it at $2 to $5 per acre on 40 years' time, at 3 per cent. interest on deferred payment. The first payments is one-fortieth of the entire purchase price, or say $32 down on a 640 acre section and $38 interest each year, the balance of the principal due in 39 years. Now we have about one-third enough voters in the county to organize our county government, and we can get 50 *hombres*, so will only need about 50 members of the "Lost Legion" or "disciples of the wanderlust" to be able to start our county off as it should be. Lest some one think that this is a desert and the land worthless, let me state that the valley land along the Pecos River can not be beaten even by the Valley of the Nile for fertility, and there is plenty of water in the Pecos to irrigate every foot of it. Back from the river are mesas which are raising the finest fruits and vines in the world, and water for irrigating is taken from shallow wells.

So any of you aforesaid adventurers who want to have a vine and fig-tree of your own, come and join us, and let's have at least one community where intelligence shall count for more than worldly pelf.—Address A. S. WHITTEN, Porterville, Loving Co., Texas.

CAN you find me a job? Young, healthy, well educated, government-licensed wireless operator, fair shot, fond of travel, can write a decent article, know something about electricity, am clean cut and well bred. Prefer hot climates to cold. 24 years old.—Address No. W 109.

AM 25 years old; 169 lbs. stripped; never ill in my life. Have drifted a good deal and my experience runs the gamut from laborer to cost accountant, including reporting, railroading, canvassing, carpentering, electrician and machinist. Have handled both steam and explosive engines of all kinds and can do my own repairing. Fair rifle and revolver shot and entirely reliable. Would like to communicate with one wanting a willing man for a good proposition.—Address No. W 108.

MAY say I know almost the entire civilized world and a fair share of the wild country. Served in 3 different navies and 2 wars; merchant service under five flags; in several of the largest submarine diving jobs in the last few years. Professional seaman, being a navigator and engineer holding U. S. license at "both ends."

Have long wished to take a small expedition to Panama to search for the treasure of that city, put on board vessels in the harbor during the approach of the pirate Sir Henry Morgan. The records state that this treasure was placed on the vessels, and that Morgan and his men, disappointed in their search for loot in the city, fired on and sank the anchored vessels. I never heard of any attempts being made to get this treasure. The depth of water in Panama harbor is not beyond the ability of a very ordinary diver and I have an idea that this treasure should not be hard to recover. At any rate I want to try it and have made plans accordingly.

A small expedition of four or five persons with a small schooner with auxiliary 12 H. P. kerosene engine and complete diving-equipment, provisioned and equipped for one year, will cost $8,000. I need $5,000 more to begin work. With such an outfit as I have in mind success is almost certain. I contemplate using the most modern submarine equipment and am fully competent to use it. Was offered a berth in an expedition to the coast of British Guiana two years ago, but was unable to let go of a job I had at that time. Each member of that crowd came back with a "bundle" big enough to choke a whale. I have kicked myself mentally ever since for losing this chance.

Now I want to get in touch with two or three good, game men who are able to raise the $5,000 necessary to go after this stuff. There is a chance we will not find anything. I take that chance too.

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But there are several good wrecks down in that part of the world that will give up enough to pay for the trip if we don't find the big treasure. It's a sporting proposition, win or lose, for game men, not for quitters. I am getting tired of my present employment for wages and want to take a chance to "get a bundle or go broke." Persons addressing me will receive complete details.—Address No. W 110.

CANADIAN, of Irish and Scotch parents; 30 years old. Business college education. Fair cook, having cooked for construction gangs on the C. P. R. in the Canadian Northwest; good shot; can ride and swim well and am of powerful build; good talker, fairly well read on current topics and a lover of adventure of every kind. Started from Winnipeg July 29, 1912, on a pedestrian tour of the world; walked to Sudbury, Ontario, a distance of over nine hundred miles, through the wildest and most thinly populated part of Canada. On reaching Sudbury, funds were so low the trip had to be discontinued. Ready and willing to go to any part of globe on shortest notice, and to do my share and a little more of the work in hand. Have "beat it" from Edmonton, Canada, to Galveston, Texas, and from Boston, Mass., to "Frisco." Have been a stoker on deep seas, and fresh water steamboats, an agent, a lecturer, and various other things in my time, so consider myself capable on almost anything in the line of legitimate adventure.—Address E. C. RYAN, 188 Queen St., East, Toronto, Can.

TWO young men, strong, very good rifle-shots, good riders. One has had military training. As for myself, am a good practical machinist. Would like to join some expedition that promises a chance for excitement, also some "long green." Are not afraid of a good scrap, in fact rather enjoy one, if you have anything on hand.—Address BUD GIBBS or ED STEVENS, 119 St. Patrick St., Toronto, Can.

HAVE been a soldier, pearler, trapper, and at present a drainage engineer. Am an expert with everything from a bow and arrow to a cannon and don't feel good unless I am wearing an ammunition-belt. Do not miss what I shoot at. Willing to take on with some expedition that can use me at the right price for any length of time and for any place. Just show it to me.—Address ARCH MEADO, Goodland, Ind.

I'VE never had the honor to do anything big, such as being in wars, or a hero. But I've wandered around the world for 14 years, since 12 years of age, and am still on the go. In my time I've been quite a number of things, and if a rolling stone gathers no moss, it certainly gathers more or less knowledge. Most of my time I've been a seafaring man, and am one yet for that matter. Then I've railroaded, both in North and South America, have walked about three-quarters of the way from Valparaiso into Rosario after running away from a sailing ship in the former port. Been a book-agent in New Jersey, sold real-estate in Washington (State), prospected for gold above the Arctic Circle, head of a fur-trading expedition to Siberia twice, and hunted walrus in the Arctic and seal in the channels of Chile through Patagonia. Been skipper of tug-boats, and gas engineer of a twin screw passenger and mail boat.

At the present time I'm 3rd officer of this vessel carrying oil for our friend John D. to various ports in the Orient from Frisco. That is about all about myself, except that after this trip I'm taking passage again to Alaska, as there is a good chance yet for adventure. Well, altogether I've had a good time. I've owned a schooner of my own, but lost her; the facts I would rather not set down, as it's only a recent happening and some parties may not think as I do and that would lead to trouble. Well, it's been "I" all through this letter, so I'll close, hoping to get in the Club. Would like to see a branch organized on the Pacific Coast.

P. S. Expect to go to Argentine next Winter and a good partner would be welcome if he cared to take a chance. There may be money in it. Couple $100 required. Nothing shady.—Address No. W 88.

YOUNG man, 24 years, 5 ft. 10, 145 lbs. Originally belonged to the North of Ireland; came to this country 3 years ago in search of adventure; have failed to find the real stuff yet. First-class repair-man on gasoline motors, with first-class references to that effect. Would like to join some exploring party on anything with adventure in it. Can handle a gun, etc. Ready to start any time and go anywhere but the Arctic regions.—Address No. W 99.

YOUNG man 25 years old, 5 ft. 5, 142 lbs., strong and healthy, wishes a position in South or Central America. Have had a little experience at most everything and traveled through Louisiana and Texas. Game for anything.—Address No. W 101.

I DON'T know whether No. 102 meant "too handy" or "handy too," but print it as he wrote it:

YOUNG chap willing to go anywhere or do anything that will afford excitement. Professional photographer and know the Rockies like a book. Do mountain guide work every Summer, so am at home in the saddle of a mustang; good rifle-shot and too handy with a Colt. I should worry about wages.—Address No. W 102.

READY for any kind of adventure with any money in it. Am about to be discharged from the service of the U. S. N. A. Have roughed it all my life before the mast on merchant ships as petty officer and other things. Have circled the globe.—Address No. 117.

WANT to join any expedition requiring a machine-gun operator or wireless operator. Hold U. S. Government first-grade license for radio operator; had experience on Pacific Coast, as well as military experience as operator in Latin-American republics; qualified cavalryman, being practically raised on a horse. Originally native of South Africa, Boer descent, but now Americanized. Have been all up and down the Congo River as well as the Zambezi River and all through British Central Africa. Was on filibustering expeditions down along the South American Continent; been through the Mexican campaign against Diaz, at Casas Grandes and Juarez. Ready on moment's notice.—Address W. E. VILJOEN, La Mesa, N. M.

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LOST TRAILS

(*Continued from page 2*)

of Capt. Nesbitt, V. C., who took over command of B Troop, and any others who were with us at Hartley Hill, Fort Martin, Fort Retreat and around Mashiangombi's Kraal in '96-'97.

My experience is as follows: Served in London Rifle Brigade Cadet Corps, then in 2nd Middlesex Artillery, also 4th Royal West Surrey Mounted detachment, went to British Columbia 1892 farming. Went to Alaska trading in 1893, Arctic expedition relief of the whalers in 1894 and on that trip went as far north and east as mouth of Mackenzie. South Africa 1895, and was one of body-guard to Col. Frank Rhodes at time of Jameson Raid. Matabele 1896, Mashonaland 1897 in B. M. M. P. and B. S. A. P. Klondike in 1898, '99, 1900. South Africa again in 1901 at tail end of war. Then Australia, Fiji Islands, and now back in British Columbia working as a contractor of railroad bridges.—Address M. M. MARSDEN, Ex. Corp. M. M. P., 875 14th Avenue, West, Vancouver, B. C., Can.

HOWARD IRWIN, who sailed from Frisco on the *Maitai*, May 31, 1911, please write CHAS. G. HARVEY, Shoshoni, Wyoming.

NEWS wanted of "Frisco Pete," who with writer left San Francisco for Indianapolis in September, 1912, stopping off at Sparks, Nev. Last heard of in Ontario.—Address No. L. T. 69.

WOULD like to find one Gulliver, who was building a railway in Iquique, Chile, in 1898. I gave him all the verse I had on hand; one of which told my sad life, the end of each verse describing my then (and now) condition:

Without an anchor to stay or check
Where the sullen breakers roar,
I'm a drifting, mastless, rudderless wreck,
In a gale on a dead lee shore.

S. B. H. HURST.

WISH to hear from Jesse E. Sherick, known as "Pat," who served in U. S. Army in Alaska, Cuba and the Philippines, and the last I heard of him was in Company I, 14th Infantry, Cebu, Cebu, Philippine Islands. This was in 1909.—Address PAUL CONNER, Howard, Kans.

JACK BONHAM, born at Hastings, England; enlisted about 1900 (aged fifteen) and served six years in band of the Royal Sussex; to Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, with two other young men, sailing from London, March, 1906; last heard from Aug., 1906, with photo in uniform of Sherbrooke Volunteers; natural musician; favorite with his comrades. Any one having word of him please communicate at once with Mrs. Jean Bonham, care ADVENTURE.

I WOULD like to hear from Frank Miller, John and Lee Crawford, who lived in Ennis, Texas, in 1892. Harvey Morris, Co. D, 22d Inft., Texas City, Tex.

WILL Fred Scott, a newspaper-man in the Fall of 1911 in Pennsylvania, last heard of in New Orleans, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE?

WM. F. MOLLENHAUER, JR., would like to communicate with Gordon Law.

Would also like to get in touch with Simon P. Culp. Address Wm. F. Mollenhauer, Jr., General Delivery, Owatonna, Minn.

WILL Charles Goolrick, who was discharged from the U. S. N. Hospital Corps at Norfolk in the Winter of 1902-3, advise an old shipmate of his address? Address Box 511, Johnstown, Pa.

SO THAT some of my old comrades may know of my whereabouts, I ask to be admitted to your Camp-Fire; for to-day I find myself half-blind, compelled to bid adieu to the roving life and only in memory live again through the wild scenes of my past life. There are no doubt some of my old shipmates and companions-in-arms who might drop me a line, should they hear of me through the Camp-Fire. F. E. Van Leue, Hornell, N. Y.

"ELLIOT, 1st Sergeant." Kindly give me full name and address. Editor ADVENTURE.

I'D LIKE to hear from, or to know what has become of, these men who were in "E" and "C" Troops, B. S. A. P., stationed in and around Salisbury, at Hartley Hills, and New Fort Martin, Rhodesia, South Africa, in 1896-1897: A. S. O'Connor, Bob Ross, Jimmie Van Damme, Hans Kufeke, Jack Griffiths, Julian Harries, Jack Gardiner. Address W. E. Prickett, care ADVENTURE.

WILL Edward J. Raeder, last heard of in Manila, P. I., communicate with Donald F. McGrew, care ADVENTURE.

IF ANY one knows where Trafford Eckley Smith is, send word to the Australian he was down the Mediterranean with in 1899. Address Australian, care ADVENTURE.

DICK MARTEL, who was in Hermosilla in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

CHARLIE SCHAEFFER, who was in Sonora in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

WORD wanted of George Dean, of Massachusetts, who sailed on the whaling-bark *Canton* in Hudson's Bay in 1893. Address Stephen A. Reynolds, care ADVENTURE.

WISH to get into communication with Charlie Sutherland, late of Bechuanaland Police, Jameson Raid, Boer War, in charge Union Castle Line Dock at Cape Town. Address Talbot Mundy, care ADVENTURE.

WILL Jack Prout, who was in Porcupine Camp in 1908, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE.

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